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# Going Viral: A Critical, Post-Structural Exploration of Feminist Culture Jamming As Cultural Therapeutic

Leah Boisen

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GOING VIRAL: A CRITICAL, POST-STRUCTURAL EXPLORATION OF FEMINIST  
CULTURE JAMMING AS CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Leah Boisen, M.A.

August 2015

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Leah Boisen

2015

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CULTURE JAMMING AS CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC

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Leah Boisen, M.A.

Approved July 28, 2014

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Suzanne Barnard, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
(Committee Chair)

---

Leswin Laubscher, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
(Committee Member)

---

Laura Engel, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English  
(Committee Member)

---

James C. Swindal  
Dean, McNulty College and Graduate  
School of Liberal Arts  
Professor of Philosophy

---

Leswin Laubscher, Ph.D.  
Chair, Department of Psychology  
Associate Professor of Psychology

## ABSTRACT

# GOING VIRAL: A CRITICAL, POST-STRUCTURAL EXPLORATION OF FEMINIST CULTURE JAMMING AS CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC

By

Leah Boisen, M.A

August 2015

Dissertation supervised by Suzanne Barnard, Ph.D.

Using a discursive framework informed by critical theory and post-structural philosophy (particularly via the works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler), this dissertation proposes the existence of pathology at both individual and cultural levels. Shifting away from the language of social problems, I propose that the pervasive and harmful ideology of patriarchy promulgated through discourse constitutes not just a problem, but a cultural sickness.

Calling for a revised understanding of the relationship between culture and individual, and a new respect for the powerfully constitutive role of discourse, I argue that many of the common symptom patterns and problems we treat women for – in particular, eating disorders, and certain kinds of depression, and anxiety – are not really individual, but social in etiology, and may require social treatment in order to truly shift. In order to affect lasting change in the lives of our patients, as well as stem the creation of patients, I argue that we must work not only at the individual level –

which may risk colluding with damaging social forces, or reinforcing via the structural format of individual therapy that the patient is solely responsible for her problems – but deliver therapeutics to the culture as well.

In this dissertation, I offer up feminist culture jamming – an activist practice of taking over mainstream media outlets such as magazines, billboards, or websites, and using them to promote atypical, feminist messages – as an example of a potential cultural therapeutic. Analyzing the work of six feminist culture jammers (and a selection of online response data) via a method of deconstructive hermeneutics, I demonstrate how systemic sexism, silencing, and a sense of inevitability continue to pervade many women’s experiences living in the contemporary United States. I also show how culture jamming offers a way for women to take action against a damaging culture, effect changes in the discourse, see alternative possibilities, and connect with each other, and argue that these elements are not only culturally, but also individually healing.

I assert that culture jamming may be a particularly effective cultural therapeutic, not only because of its capacity to help women act, connect, and impact discourse, but because it functions in a number of unique ways. Likening culture jamming to a virus, I illustrate how culture jamming subverts damaging normative social discourses from within by appearing in the everyday space, disguising itself in everyday packaging, reaching massive audiences, and empowering audience members to further action.

Finally, I conclude with suggestions for how clinicians might be informed by the practice of culture jamming, including a renewed respect for the microtraumatic effect living in a patriarchal culture may have on female patients, and a recognition of cultural pathology and the need for cultural therapeutics. I offer specific insights from cultural psychologists such as Cushman, Hillman, and Sapiro as to how might clinicians make room for the socio-cultural world

in their practice as healers, and emphasize the common goals – though different means – of culture jammers and psychotherapists.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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A great debt of thanks is owed to Duquesne University, and to the McAnulty College of Liberal Arts for their support of this research, both financially and institutionally, as well as for their support of my professional development and learning these past five years.

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## **Part I: Framing and introducing the research**

### **Introduction**

#### ***Experiences in the therapy room***

As a training therapist in a clinical psychology program, I have occupied a uniquely privileged space over the past four years. While wrought with many troubles and traps, being a therapist is an exceptional position from which to know someone: few other relationships in human life are like it. Working primarily in a longer term capacity, I came to know roughly a dozen people incredibly intimately over the course of the years. These people told me the thoughts, desires, and struggles they felt unable to tell anyone else, partly enabled because they did not really know me in many ways at all. Due to a number of factors – including my own interests as well as treatment trends – it also happened that nearly all the patients I saw were women or girls. As I advanced in my training and began reflecting on the cases I had seen so far, some noticeable trends began to emerge.

Though my training and readings had emphasized the important role of gender in a person's development and symptom patterns, the similarities amongst my female patients' experiences and ways of relating to their bodies (and to the world) were truly striking. Each of these women or girls was of course unique in her own way, but I first began to notice similarities across their experiences in terms of embodied experience and eating behavior. While only a few of the patients I saw would meet the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual's (DSM) criteria for an eating disorder – still, a few – most or all of them had difficult and distressing feelings about the shapes of their bodies and the ways that they eat.



They ate too much. They couldn't eat these foods. They *shouldn't* eat those foods. Their bodies were "too fat." Too tall. Too skinny here and not enough there. All of them bore a remarkably similar pattern of self monitoring and self shaming around their bodies, complete with fascinatingly nuanced sets of strategies to mitigate their embodied experience and experiences with eating. They talked about their bodies as bargaining chips, rental properties, or fleshy prisons and seemed to often imbue their bodies with the worst and most hated aspects of themselves. Most obviously, they acted on and talked about their bodies as objects separate from themselves – not "me."

I also began to realize there was an unsettling amount of abuse and sexual assault in the histories of the women I was treating. Perhaps even more disturbing than the number of incidents, however, was the ways in which my patients discussed them. I saw a college junior, for instance, who was raped by a friend during the course of our treatment, but whose main struggle in session centered around whether she even should call it rape, and whether she had said 'no' loud enough for it to count. I also worked with a woman for nearly two years who confided in me that she had been sexually abused by her uncle as a child but would say no more, remarking, "those kinds of things just happen and it's best to put them away."

This is to say nothing of the young artist I saw plagued by dreams and disturbing memories she couldn't quite put together, who was sometimes inexplicably repulsed by her boyfriend's touch. Or the desk clerk whose brother once broke her wrist for telling on him; the belly dancer who carved words into her arms and sometimes blacked out during sexual encounters; or the organic chemist whose father would lock her in her room when he was angry.

In addition to self-conscious eating patterns, objectifying relationships to their bodies, and histories peppered with acts of violence from men, many of the women I worked with also

struggled to be heard, and to speak what they desired. They negotiated and compromised with others, but they rarely asked for what they wanted directly. Most had difficulty with confrontation and felt uncomfortable expressing, or sometimes even feeling anger: their experiences of rage were perceived as dangerous and engulfing to them. Though a few female patients I saw had no trouble communicating dissatisfaction, many found themselves burying or swallowing their problems so as to not upset others, or laboring to construct prettier packaging for their dissent.

Keeping the peace – for the family, for their friend group, for their colleagues at work – seemed prized above all in so many of my female patients’ accounts... which is also why they ate what they truly wanted in private, or kept the family secrets so well. What was particularly striking to me was that the chosen means of keeping the peace more often than not was *self* regulation. Whether by modulating what they ate, choosing to not tell people what they really wanted, biting back their rage, or losing another few pounds, so many of the women I saw sought to control the chaos around and inside them by working on and disciplining *themselves*.

What I heard over and over again from my female patients was an awareness that the world could be dangerous and cruel, and the best way to mitigate the unpredictability is to adjust one’s own behavior. Get smarter, better, stronger, faster, thinner, smaller, more in control. Tighten up those defenses, ramp up that anxiety – be *careful* out there. Fix your problems by getting a better attitude, a better set of skills, a more complete emotional experience, a promotion, or a new outfit.

Pervasive across my patients’ accounts was a sense that they could solve the messy feelings they found themselves having, or the horrifying situations they found themselves living in by just *working* on themselves, and controlling themselves better. Losing that bit of weight, putting a positive spin on things, getting out of the house more, not letting themselves feel so afraid, not being so... or not doing... or just...

Lucky for me, self-work is the business of therapy. Self-work is what I knew how to do, and self-work we did. Each time my patient would tell me about her troubling thoughts, feelings, and experiences, I always took the tack of a good individual therapist. I explored the feelings. I asked her more about her experiences – when did it begin? What were her memories? Could she tell me more about the thoughts she has when she vomits up dinner (“only every once in awhile, after a big meal” my 15 year old patient once told me off handedly)? Or what she fears and fantasizes will happen when she’s panicking at the bus stop because it’s 9pm and she’s never waited in this part of town before? Does not getting out of bed all day remind her of something, and whose voice is she drowning out when she goes to take a drink?

Yet through all of this, I started to have my own problem. I started to feel inauthentic, maybe a little disingenuous even — I was treating these issues as though they were my patient’s problem, uniquely hers... yet I don’t really believe that was true. After all it wasn’t only inside my therapy room that I heard women evoking this discourse of the body as an object to be hated and controlled, or the gospel of self-control as a means to accomplishing all ends. My friends, my family, my female students – so many women I knew seemed to think and behave as though the prescription for a world more hospitable to women was to be found in controlling and regulating one’s *own* responses to the world’s inhospitality

In my work as a therapist, however, the evidence was mounting that there is something deeply and disturbingly wrong, not in the ways women respond, but in our culture. The systemic violation of women is more common than even I had understood, the results of which I began to see as these shared patterns of disturbance appearing in my patients. Certainly my own readings and discussions with friends had already made me aware of systemic sexism and its effects on women, but being such an intimate confidant for so many women introduced a startling new

dimension to my academic insights. I couldn't ignore the similarity in experience across the accounts of my patients, and I couldn't help but start to wonder what was going on here, and if what we were doing in the consulting room was enough.

### ***Experiences in the grocery store***

While I was training as a clinician, I was also learning and growing as a scholar: a feminist scholar in particular. The four years of my education were spent amassing an incredible knowledge in psychology, philosophy, feminist practices, cultural studies, and queer theory. I engaged radical new notions and learned about intersectionality and identity politics, family dynamics and social constructionism. I started to get dissatisfied.

Here I was learning all these amazing ideas, ideas that I thought could change the world. At the very same time, in and outside of my session room, the world was looking increasingly bleak and unchangeable, especially for the women I knew. I felt a complicated responsibility to the women in my life, my patients most of all: I was supposed to be helping them, somehow, but the means available to me for helping — specifically in my work as a therapist — began to seem increasingly limited.

Worse yet, at times I felt I was colluding in the problems my female patients faced by continuing to situate whatever was happening *inside* them, and more or less turning a blind eye to the social nature of their problems, which I *knew* existed. Yet how to include this vast world, and all of its effects, in the therapy room? Could the therapy room hold it all? Could I?

Between bouts of ennui I found myself in the check out lane of a local grocery store, leafing through the pages of a *Cosmopolitan* magazine, bored and waiting to pay for my items. I

had guiltily reached for the glossy cover — did I really need 10 new ways to improve my sex life *and* tone my body at the same time? – finally succumbing with a sigh and thumbing through the pages filled with emaciated bodies and dubious headlines (“Get ahead at work with power colors!”).

As I did, suddenly a bright aqua flyer fluttered to my feet. It was 8½ x 11, a standard page, with a highlighting orange box framing the large, bold type which read simply, “Beautiful. Just the way you are.” My eyes welled with tears as I saw it, as they always do when I tell people about the project, and as they still do even now when I type its description. I put the magazine back, but I took the flyer. The next day, a friend and I made 30 copies and began dropping them at a nearby bookstore.

However, the image of the flyer, and my reaction to it, haunted me for months following this brief encounter in the grocery store. Why had I reacted that way? What about this simple message was so profound that it brought me to tears?

By this point in my life, I already actively and ardently identified as a feminist. I knew all about objectification theory and internalized sexism (why then had I picked up the magazine in the first place?). I had participated in Take Back the Night marches and equal pay rallies. I guest lectured in colleagues’ classrooms about media sexualization, gender construction, and sexual discrimination. I could dress down anyone who dared argue with me about the disparities and struggles that women face in our culture in five minutes flat. Yet all that seemed to pale in the face of those six words. Beautiful. Just the way you are.

What I ultimately realized was so profound about the Beautiful Just The Way You Are (BJTWYA) campaign – and my experience with it – is that the poster took all those complex theories that I had learned in the classroom, with all their pomp and truth, stripped them down, and

put them on the streets. Not only was the simple and easy to understand format an attractive delivery vehicle, BJTWYA put the message where people could actually access it (without money, or education, or privilege) and offered an easy route for others to take similar action (without money, or education, or privilege).

The years that have followed have been a ravenous hunt for any and all traces of this kind of rogue feminism — a feminism that takes the learning and the history of our movement and delivers it where it is desperately needed: to women in grocery stores. I have since come to understand that the BJTWYA project is part of a burgeoning branch of creative activism called culture jamming: a practice of taking over mainstream media outlets such as magazines, billboards, or websites, and using them to send alternative messages than those being typically offered in media spaces.

As I began to collect these jams, I was still seeing my patients, and I began to wonder about how these worlds I was straddling might collide. Perhaps this reaction, the welling in my heart and in my eyes as I saw the fluttering flyer, was what was missing in my session room. Maybe my patients and I couldn't solve certain problems because they weren't really ours to solve. Maybe the answer did not lie inside them, but out in the world. And maybe my patients weren't the ones in need of a cure... maybe it's *Cosmopolitan* that needs curing.

### ***A problem outside moving in***

How might the practice of therapy and the field of psychology differ if we were to acknowledge that sicknesses are not merely individual, but cultural as well? What if we were to expand our clinical view to see pathology as not simply originating in the brain, disposition, or

even family system, but transmitting from the culture? What if we moved towards seeing certain kinds of pathology, such as eating disorders and sexual trauma, not as problems that belong to the individual, but symptoms of a sick culture that is infecting its citizens?

What would we do then, with this leftover bit, this piece of my patient's troubles that I do not believe belongs to her and did not originate from within her, but has moved inside her?

Therapy is, after all, a practice that capitalizes upon, and requires, a notion of a relatively self-enclosed individual with a psychic system all her own. Though some clinicians acknowledge that the social is involved in causing or maintaining people's distress, our cures — medications, talk therapy, homework — still tend to rely heartily on individualistic notions. Hillman & Ventura (1992) write:

“We’ve had a hundred years of analysis ... [and] we still locate the psyche inside the skin. You go *inside* to locate the psyche, you examine *your* feelings and *your* dreams, they belong to you. Or it’s interrelations, interpsyche, between your psyche and mine. That’s been extended a little bit into family systems and office groups... but look what’s left out of that. What’s left out is a deteriorating world.” (p. 3).

That is to say whether we ask the patient to report thoughts or dreams, talk about feelings or memories, problem solve or express herself, negotiate with others or test her reality, ignore her body or listen to its messages; psychology and the general practice of psychotherapy still typically locates the problem inside the patient somewhere. Perhaps others contributed to growing it, or to keeping it in place, but it is *hers* to solve. And it is hers to solve not by changing others, or rebelling against society as a whole, but by her changing herself.

Of course it bears noting that psychotherapy is a huge tradition, with a very long history and a great diversity of practices that take up individuality on a spectrum. At one far end, many iterations of psychotherapy heartily endorse and doggedly follow a therapeutic model that capitalizes on an isolated and self-enclosed individual, while others move more towards including the social and cultural spheres of the patient's experience, and point to the arbitrary divisions between individual and cultural entities and importance of attending to context.

If we continue to only emphasize individual interventions and individual change, however, we clinicians leave a damaged and damaging society neatly untouched. Further, we dangerously *collude* with society when we encourage patients – particularly those who are marginalized and subject to systemic and institutional oppression – to “accept a change in their subjective experience as a substitute for changes in their objective reality” (Sampson, 1981, p. 735). When we ignore the intensely interwoven nature of the patient and the culture that she lives in by insisting that she work only on *herself* to alleviate distress, we do injustice to our patients.

This is not to say that individual psychotherapy is a misguided effort towards ameliorating suffering. However, it may be an insufficient one. If we truly accept how profoundly cultures impact and move inside individuals, we must admit they do so with all their curiosities and ills, and we must give up the notion of an ultimate separation between “I” and the world “I” live in. Though psychologists acknowledge, to an increasing degree, the role that social environments play in personal development, we do not prescribe social change: we prescribe personal change. Further still, we as a field continue to uphold that these changes are separate.

Using theoretical lenses of post-structural philosophy, cultural psychology, critical theory, and feminism, this dissertation proposes that changes and disturbances at social and individual levels are indeed not so separate, but deeply intertwined and interdependent. In this dissertation I



will build a case for conceptualizing cultural sicknesses as well as individual sickness. Through a conceptualization of patriarchal discourse as cultural pathology, I will argue that cultural sicknesses require cultural, and not merely individual therapeutic measures. Further, I posit that if we as psychologists and clinicians truly aim to help people, we must administer cultural as well as individual therapeutics, and we must work to bring about social as well as personal change.

In the chapters that follow I will attempt to concretize the somewhat abstract notions of cultural pathology and cultural therapeutics using women's struggles and feminist culture jamming as an illustrative example. Drawing from six instances of feminist culture jamming, reflections from the women who created them, responses from people who saw them, and connections to theory and clinical application, I will argue that much of women's daily suffering is attributable to systemic causes, and that any therapeutic work with women requires a revised understanding of what hurts and what heals at both individual and cultural levels.

After unfolding suffering and healing on the importantly interrelated levels of the individual and the society she lives in, I will offer feminist culture jamming as one particularly vivid example of what may be thought of as a cultural therapeutic: an action that aims to heal the culture of a pervasive sickness. I will also point to the ways that culture jamming (or creative activism) may help women *specifically* where either individual measures (like therapy) or other cultural movements (like feminism) are limited in their efforts. Through this work I hope to trouble some of psychology's thinking about the limits and applications of psychotherapy, and to unite with fields of social transformation and creative activism in our shared goal of healing.

## **A place from which to speak: Situating the research within a theoretical context**

Before moving ahead, the first task is to orient this particular project within certain fields and to clarify what important terms and concepts will be put to use. Most broadly, this dissertation approaches subjectivity, gender, and culture using a social constructionist lens, with insights from critical theory as well as post-structural and postmodern philosophies.

However, since even within this seemingly narrow designation, different thinkers take up questions of what it means to be a person, have a gender, or live in a culture in radically divergent ways, the following sections will serve to clarify how key post-structural and critical authors are specifically informing my project. This chapter will define and operationalize critically loaded terms such as self, gender, culture, and psychology, and, in so doing, establish a theoretical framework from which to make sense of later results and interpretations.

### ***Discourse and its creative capacities***

Discourse is one of the key concepts I draw upon throughout this research for understanding culture and the interactions between culture and individuals. Discourse refers to a kind of powerful talk that does not just describe, but *creates* possibilities, practices, and objects by idealizing particular knowledges and establishing norms, which are shared and upheld by the individuals who internalize discursive messages. Discourse is much more than just talk or language, however, and may include any “set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (Burr, 2003, p. 64).

Much of what we typically call ‘culture’ then is actually the various discourses, or constructed narratives of a culture, which in turn influence and create socio-cultural contexts. ‘Culture’ as I am defining it here includes the discourses present in a given environment, but also the physical and material aspects of that environment – the landscape, cultural artifacts, and particular people that exist within the environment. Employing a Foucauldian view, discourses are narratives that ‘represent’ people, objects, or events, but in so doing they actually *construct* particular versions of, and specific ideals for, those people, objects, or events – they are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49).

To be very concrete, we could use the example of the discourse of femininity. An easy way to think about discourse is to imagine how a completely naïve visitor to our current culture would learn about our various practices, identities, and artifacts. It would become quickly clear to such a visitor that we as a culture group people based on gender, from signs indicating male and female bathrooms, categories of clothing and hair style worn differently by different bodies, and the language we all use, including names and pronouns. What it means to be a woman specifically – what women look, behave, talk, or interact like – would need to be *learned* and would be informed by images of women in vacuuming advertisements, fairy stories about mothers and witches, jokes overheard on the bus about dumb blondes, or anecdotes from friends regarding nagging wives.

All of these elements – our shared language, but also images, myths, and implied relations – comprise the discourse on what it means to be a woman. And, as the following sections will illuminate more fully, this discourse of femininity is not merely descriptive but also prescriptive, with serious consequences for how women view themselves and are empowered to act in the world. Without a discourse to draw upon and frame one’s actions or choices within, it is difficult – some would say impossible – to act at all. This question of agency is a difficult one to grapple with,

and will be taken up again at the conclusion of this section.

Importantly, there may be many discourses in play for any given subject of discourse – we could certainly come up with a number of different discourses for different versions of femininity, including the tomboy, the diva, the butch, the mother and on and on. Each of these discourses would include within it certain practices and standards for normalcy in order to adhere to the category. Each identity discourse would also have certain consequences for practicing this particular discursive identity – or for not practicing it.

That the reader likely formed a picture of each of these identity ‘types’ – the tomboy, the diva – as she read them speaks to the effective and informal nature of discourse. It is unlikely that anyone ever systematically taught the characteristics of a tomboy to the reader (or to anyone!). Even in the absence of formal knowledge, however, an image and a rough sense of what a tomboy would act and be like is already at hand, stitched together from movie posters, words of warning, or kids on the playground over the years.

In addition to producing subjects, discourse of course also produces objects, insofar as it bestows objects with *meaning*, without which they would be more or less useless physical material. A table then is only a table because of the discourse of table-ness. In our culture, this discourse tells us both what a table looks like – a flat surface on the top, at least a few supportive legs, made out of hard material – but also what a table is used for (eating, playing games, *not* dancing atop or putting the litterbox on). Discourse will also convey other associated meanings as well, such as what it may indicate if someone doesn’t have a table and eats on the floor (Japanese? Poor? Student?).

Discourses also create and shape practices – we could talk, for instance, of the changing discourse on marijuana use right now in the United States. What may have once been an

inexcusable and deplorable drug addiction is now a legal recreational activity in many areas, which also brings changes to the kinds of people we think will engage in such an activity as well as how it fits within our cultural values and traditions.

Though all people use and uphold discourses in their everyday speech and actions, it is important to note that discourse is not ‘authored’ by any individual person. The discourses which exist in a given culture are “outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author” (Butler, 2004, p. 1). Thus discourses are often difficult to trace to any kind of origin. Because certain discourses will disproportionately benefit some groups, those groups who benefit will often be invested in perpetuating these certain discourses as normal, but discourses require the participation and the self-regulation of people who take them up in order to proliferate.

Since identity and subjectivity are the focus of this dissertation, the following sections will focus on the role of discourse in producing individual subjects, and specifically gendered subjects. However, what is common to the discursive function across the production of subject, object, or practice is that it does not merely reflect something we all know to be true, but *creates* truth through social agreement.

### *Discourse and the role of culture in the production of the self*

Discourse does not just construct particular kinds of subjects – the tomboy, the diva, the mother – but forms the foundation for our belief in individual subjectivity at all. The fact that we feel ourselves as unique and independent entities with beliefs and opinions that originate from within a core self should not necessarily indicate the *truth* of such a feeling. Rather, this feeling of ‘myself’ as different from others is only evidence of a highly effective discourse of modern subjectivity, with a long history in our culture.

In the modernist view of the self, “I” am not my body, or my behaviors, or the relationships I have with other people (nor am I the ‘other’ people for that matter) but something behind all those trappings. As famously defined by Descartes – “I think, therefore I am” – “I” am the thinking, reasoning, perceiving agent who resides within my body. My behaviors and relationships with others then are effects of my internal choices, which I act out through my body. The modernist subject, or self, is consequently one defined by internal unity and consistency (Gergen, 1991). We can count on the self as a “knowing subject” who is transparent to herself as the center of her experience and author of her stories (Hall, 1996). The self in the modern view is an essential core of the human being, stable throughout time and across contexts, conducting behaviors and having thoughts in a relatively consistent pattern.

From a discursive and social constructionist point of view, however, the things we say, do, and believe are manifestations of the discursive culture that we live in and share, not representations of an internal personality, temperament, or self. We may select our identities and beliefs from an array of discourses available to us, but it is discourse which ultimately “governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about” (Hall, 2001, p. 72), including subjectivity. Hence while we believe ourselves to be free agents; choosing our lives, behaviors, and identities, the rules and options are in fact already set out before us.

Our “selves,” from a postmodern and discursive point of view, are not essential characters housed within us that generate unique thoughts and perspectives. Rather, the self is re-imagined not as a “substantive thing” that one “has” (Butler, 1990, p. 24) but as a *site*, or a location on which discourses can be played out and different performances of identity taken up. When it comes to subjectivity, my choices in clothing, political candidate, career path, or indeed, even very deeply felt notions such as sexual orientation or racial identity are not the products of my private sense of

self, but of a series of negotiations I make with the world, and ways in which I choose to act within a discursive field of restraint.

This discursive view of the self helps us understand the radical variance in subjectivity we see cross culturally. If it were really *true* in some essential or fundamental way that all people have individual selves inside them, then we could expect to see this view of the self all over the world, and consistent throughout time. In fact, stories of the self and subjectivity vary wildly around the world, and even our own culture has held very different notions at different times regarding identity and subjectivity (Cushman, 1995). It is also true that specific identity beliefs, such as what it means to “be Black” or “be a woman” take many different forms around the globe. These examples indicate that even visible and body based identities such as race and gender are imbued with meaning – and serious existential consequences – only through the cultures they exist within, and are not as essential qualities of humanity.

If selves are not internal entities, but performances forged from the discursive options available to us through culture, then a revised understanding of the ways in which culture impacts individuals is needed. Cushman (1995) points out that most views of the interaction between culture and self use the metaphor of cultural forces as a kind of “indigenous ‘clothing’ that covers the universal human” (p. 18). In this way culture certainly makes an impact, and it makes individuals *appear* very differently, but underneath it all, we each have an “isolated, self-contained individual” (Cushman, 1995, p. 77) which can be worked upon.

A better metaphor might be that discourse, the material structure of society, the landscape, and the cultural objects and artifacts produced are like cloth that both culture and individual are woven from. Rather than culture being like clothes on the body, we might imagine how both individual and culture are like different *pieces* of clothing, knit from the same cloth. Thus one does

not cover the other, but both are always in a relationship of matching, clashing, tucking into, or riding up on each other.

The separation that we then get of “I” as distinct from “culture” — which impacts and affects me in an ancillary manner — is an entirely false dichotomy if we understand individuals as foundationally, and constantly, being created out of discursive culture. Cushman (1995) writes,

“Culture infuses individuals through the social practices of the everyday world, shaping and forming in the most fundamental ways how humans conceive of the world and their place within it, how they see others, how they engage in a moral framework of mutual obligations and responsibilities, where they are located in a hierarchical structure of local power relations, and how they use all of this to determine their own behavior and make choices.” (p. 17)

As Cushman points out, the current ways in which we talk about a sense of self as something ‘in here’ and culture as something ‘out there’ is deeply flawed and problematic if we consider how profoundly culture impacts individuals.

Guattari (1995) also emphasizes the crucially interpenetrating nature of culture and self, pointing to a need to “enlarge the definition of subjectivity beyond the classical opposition between individual subject and society” (p. 1). Eschewing boundaries of inner and outer, Guattari (1995) writes, “technological machines of information and communication operate at the very heart of human subjectivity, not only within its memory and intelligence, but within its sensibility, affects, and unconscious fantasms,” (p. 4). A view of media, technology, and other cultural artifacts as stuff out in the world that interacts with, but is decidedly different than the stuff of the



person consequently fails to see the profound ways in which individual subjectivity, or sense of self, is a product of social, political, and historical forces.

If selfhood is a product of discourse and social construction, however, how exactly does this happen? How do we come to feel ourselves as individuals, intimately invested in our own identities and choices? How does discourse move inside us, and what implications does this have for questions of power, mutability, or agency? The next section will address these important questions by specifically looking at the production of gender through discourse, and the ways in which woman internalize discourses of femininity.

### *Discourse and the role of culture in the production of gender*

As should be clear from the preceding pages, social constructionism is a foundational paradigm used in this dissertation and, as such, definitions of gender proceeding neatly from biological sex are roundly rejected. Burr (2003) offers a tidy definition of gender as “the normative prescriptions of masculinity and femininity in a culture” (p. 3), stressing how gender, and gender roles, develop not from an internal set of characteristics or a sexed body, but from a set of cultural expectations and practices to enforce those expectations. Gender, like notions of the individual self separate from the world and others around her, is a construction of discourse, not an absolute or essential truth.

Many feminists offer well-reasoned arguments and strong evidence for the unlinking of gender from physical sex, perhaps the most compelling of which is that gender is arranged differently by different cultures at different times. Even within our own culture the traits, attitudes, clothes, and behaviors that are considered to belong to a certain category of gender have shifted

considerably — the history of the skirt as a masculine item of clothing, or pink as a boy's color being perhaps the most striking examples. And this is to say nothing of other cultures where the gendered categories of men and women have different social implications, or other social constructions of gender besides men and women exist (Nanda, 1999).

Countries such as Thailand and India – among many other societies contemporarily and even more historically – have institutionally recognized third genders like kathoey, or hijra, which are seen as unique and distinct gendered identities from that of 'man' or 'woman.' Though the kathoey and hijras have physically masculine bodies, their gender – a designation based on their appearance and social role – is not male but hijra, or kathoey. Even in the United States, many native populations recognize a third gender called Two-Spirit, in which either a physically male or female bodied person adopts a liminal gender identity of neither man nor women, but Two-Spirit, which transcends and incorporates elements of both male and female genders (Nanda, 1999).

As with different constructions of selfhood, this cross cultural variance helps us to see that the iterations of gender we currently practice are not a result of the brain, genitals, or essential human character, but of the particular discourses currently en vogue in our culture. Gender is a separate identity from physical sex and is a *social* performance, albeit a unique and extremely important one. To say that gender is socially constructed should by no means undercut its importance as an identity, either for the person who feels it or for the observer who recognizes it in another.

A belief in the existence and innateness of gender is a deeply held and protected part of our cultural ideology, in part due to a conflation of gender and physical sex which serves to 'naturalize' gender roles and concepts. Physical sex – our bodies, genitals, and hormones – is an observable and material difference, but the meanings and roles bestowed to these sexes must be

conveyed and taken up through discursive gender construction. Gender construction begins from the moment of birth (or before, in the parents' fantasies) when the baby is placed in clothing or a room decorated in appropriately gendered colors, dressed in gendered clothes, given a name, and referred to with gendered pronouns.

These of course are only the most basic and obvious ways in which gender construction begins in infancy, and there are many other compelling instances of how the world genders babies, including in the differential adjectives and descriptions given to boy and girl babies.<sup>1</sup> Additional discrepancies exist in how differently sexed babies are held, what sorts of toys people give to them, how their crying or smiling is responded to, and dozens of other minute social differences (Etaugh & Bridges, 2013).

Given that gender is instilled in humans so early and across virtually every realm of experience, it is therefore an issue of serious importance, even if it may be socially constructed. Echoing caution from underestimating the serious impact of the social field, Judith Butler (1990) offers a compelling account of gender as *performative*, that is, not something one "has" but something that one "does."

Describing gender as fundamentally based in the social, Butler (2004) argues that "gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity, performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing" (p. 1). The discursive rules for the game of gender have been set before us, a game into which we are born and conscripted as players, regardless of want or will. However, Butler cautions that this does not mean gender is "automatic or mechanical" but rather is "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (p. 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Spotted just this week at a local store: pink bibs sporting "Mommy's Little Cupcake" across the front and blue bibs remarking "I'm a boob man." Consider the conflation already happening between masculinity, heterosexuality, and the sexualizing of women for the infant boy, or the pairing of female status with food and diminutives for the infant girl.

We exercise *some* choice, awareness, and autonomy when it comes to performing our genders – in the clothes we choose, the romantic partners we take, the jobs we perform, to name only a few obvious markers – but we also do so within a range that is limited by social acceptance. There are some options we dare not perform for risk of what such a choice would mean socially, and there are other options we may not even be able to imagine because the discursive formations in our culture preclude them. For example, students I teach are routinely shocked to discover there are third genders in other parts of the world, as even the structural possibility for such diversity typically escapes them.

Butler encourages us to see the ways in which the particular genders we play out are not natural outcroppings of our essential selves, but performances we are enacting within a complex web of consequences. Discourses do not simply exist around us, or act upon us – as in the traditional view of culture and individual – but we take up and use them willingly, performing our genders through what Butler (1993) calls repetitive citationality.

Repetitive citationality refers to the ways in which we constantly cite, or refer back to overarching discourses of identity through our particular clothes, gestures, speech, and other aspects of self performance. When we see another person and recognize that person as a gender, we make such an assessment based on characteristics of their physical bodies — whose meanings, Butler would argue, are also ultimately determined by discourse — but also on so much more: the way the person walks, wears make up, speaks, smokes, glances, or giggles.

Grave consequences come to those who choose to eschew discursively normative options for identity, or who attempt to perform these discourses differently, as Butler illustrates with the examples of intersexed, queer, and transgender people. This is in part due to the fact that discourses are socially upheld, and beyond the grasp of any individual. While Butler points to the

ways in which we internalize discourses and then perform them through repetitive citationality, Althusser (1970) helps us understand how others enforce these roles and performances.

If gender construction begins from the moment of birth – or, in the imaginal, even before – then no one in our culture escapes its normalizing gaze. Even if we as individuals begin to see the machinations of discourse and desire to exist outside the available options and normative prescriptions, other people will make it very difficult for us to do so. This is because discourse and the knowledge it creates will always imply normalcy, which, postmodernists would argue, will always carry with it an exercise of power, a point that will be made much more fully in the next section.

Discourses work precisely because they render themselves invisible and *natural*, so it is often disturbing, or deeply unsettling for people to see someone act in violation of dominant discourses. Because discourses are naturalized, outliers are thought to be acting against the laws or rules of nature, and social reinforcement to encourage them back towards the normative path is widely and unconsciously practiced by everyone. In policing identity for others, we also police the boundaries of normalcy for *ourselves* – we affirm that the ways *we* feel and practice identity are indeed natural, normal, and right. Though extremely powerful in effect, this policing is most often done unintentionally, without the person's willing or even acknowledging what they are doing.

Althusser (1970) argues that discourses of normalcy seep out into the culture from Ideological State Apparatuses such as the church or school – here we might also add, or the media or the internet – and then hail, or interpellate, the subject to conform to them. To interpellate is to recognize a unique entity as a thing of discourse, ideology, or category and to therefore bring forward subjectivity. Every time a woman steps outside her house and is recognized in the gaze of another *as* a woman, she is thusly interpellated or translated from an individual person to a subject

of the ideology of gender and what is discursively prescribed for being a “woman.”

Althusser (1970) writes, “the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing,” (p. 49) pointing out that ideology necessarily creates subjects of those ideological beliefs — even though most people believe they freely choose their identities, behaviors, and opinions. When ideology includes patriarchal standards of unequal power and status, the subjects created by such ideology will then internalize, conform to, and treat others in accordance with these ideals.

A simple and concrete example of interpellation would be when I walk out of my house and am greeted by the bus driver as “Miss.” When this happens, I am reminded that the bus driver sees me as a woman. Further, I know that “woman” is a discursive category loaded with meanings and prescriptions for behavior: how I should respond back, if I should smile, where I should sit on the bus, to name only a few of the decisions such an interpellation causes in the immediate moment following it. Thus my behavior on the bus is not the product of my innate womanness, nor even necessarily of my desires or choices, but of a complex process of using and working within certain options available to me through the discourses that call to me.

Though the bus driver’s greeting is a seemingly innocuous instance, and a reasonably benign one, it is one of the hundreds of interpellations I will face in any given day that remind me of my status as a woman – and that I *am* a woman, at least in the eyes of others. To be visibly recognizable means that I can participate in normal society – those who cannot be so easily estimated, such as the transgender population, are often relegated to social margins and denied inclusion in formal institutions or social institutions – but it also makes it very difficult to think or to exist outside of the normative discourses of gender.

Butler (1997) writes that this ‘subjection:’ “is not only a subordination, but a securing and

maintaining, a putting into place of a subject” (p. 90-91), it is, literally “the *making* of a subject” (p. 88). Subjection, through discourse and interpellation, does not merely describe my state, but forges a female subject out of me, and encourages a particular kind of consciousness. Interpellation then is a way in which we all uphold discourse and in which individuals are constantly re-created as subjects of discourse, regardless of any individual intent.

Discourse consequently creates gendered beings and gender identity by setting a stage where certain identities are available to be performed (as given to us through the shared language, images, and practices of our culture). These performances are supported by ideological beliefs, which hold certain performances as more normal than others (i.e. binary gender) and are enforced by interpellation, which creates subjects of discourse. Discourse is also held in place by powerful institutions and individuals who stand to benefit from the proliferation of certain discourses and the repression of others. As we will see more clearly in the coming section, discourse, normalcy, and power are always tied together, and the elevation of certain discourses of femininity to the suppression of others is not coincidental.

An understanding of gender as founded in and through discourse enables us to make sense of how gender roles stabilize in a society and are transmitted across generations without appealing to biological explanations (which do not hold up cross-culturally). Though gender is held in place by social policing and ongoing interpellations that bear serious social consequences, we also see that individuals can and do resist normative discourses of gender, which in and of itself encourages a social perspective. Additionally, the very fact that gender variance exists indicates that other conceptions of gender *are* possible, and that we may be able to radically alter our current discourses surrounding gender by radically altering the social terrain.

If it is true that we could choose to topple the system of gender entirely through discursive

interventions, however, then why focus on gender at all? If gender is a changeable social construct, then some argue we would be better off looking *away* from it, rather than continuing to feed its perpetuation with recognition and attention. Certain radically social thinkers might criticize that to continue to use the problematic categories of gender only further reifies them. Even by publishing this research, I am suggesting that “women” form a category of people who suffer in unique ways and thus, critics might argue, contributing to a discourse of women as a discrete kind of people, rather than trying to overthrow the entire binary system of gender that emphasizes differences between men and women.

This is a fair point, and it is my hope that ultimately gender discourses *can* be re-arranged in more macro ways that embody more freedom for all people. In the meantime, however, political inequalities *do* exist, and have existed historically. Julia Kristeva points out that though gender may be entirely socially constructed, it is nevertheless a tool of political oppression, and must be therefore equally and differently applied as a tool of political liberation. Kristeva remarks:

“The belief that ‘one is a woman’ is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that ‘one is a man.’ I say ‘almost’ because there are still many goals which women can achieve: freedom of abortion and contraception, daycare centers for children, equality on the job, etc. Therefore, we must use ‘we are women’ as an advertisement or slogan in our demands. On a deeper level, however, a woman cannot ‘be’” (Kristeva quoted in Marks & de Courtivron, 1987)

As Kristeva’s remarks illuminate, even if we theoretically deconstruct gender to a place of nonexistence in the discursive realm, there are still very real and pragmatic consequences to



gender as an applied system. Though it is risky, it may be necessary to use recognizable discursive categories in order to speak to dominant systems and effect change within them. This use of the terms of gender, however, should not be mistaken for support of the normative system of gender (although that may be an unavoidable structural effect). Rather, I embrace some of the language of gender in this research because we as people cannot help but exist within it. Christine di Stefano (1995) writes:

“Gender is basic in ways that we have yet to fully understand... it functions as a ‘difference that makes a difference’ even as it can no longer claim the legitimating mantle of *the* difference. The figure of the shrinking woman may perhaps be best appreciated and utilized as an aporia within contemporary theory: as a recurring paradox, question, dead end, or blind spot to which we must repeatedly return, because to ignore her altogether is to risk forgetting and thereby losing what is left of her” (p. 75)

To write of gender is, by the very act, to strengthen its existence in some way: to continue to put terms of gender into discursive regulation and therefore to render it real. However, to refuse to participate in the terms of gender limits one’s speaking ability, and erases the very real effects of gender on our lives. Gender is not no-thing — we read it in others, we are politically oppressed by it, and we *feel* it — but even as we emphasize its social roots, we cannot simply toss gender aside, or disregard its important character. Teresa De Lauretis writes that there is a kind of “essence” to gender insofar as it gathers a common world, writing:

“The ‘essence’ of woman is more like the essence of the triangle than the essence of the

thing-in-itself: it is the specific properties (e.g. a female sexed body), qualities (a disposition to nurturance, a certain relation to the body etc.) or necessary attributes (e.g. the experience of femaleness, of living in the world as female) that women have developed or have been bound to historically, in their differently patriarchal sociocultural contexts, which makes them women, and not men.” (quoted in Putnam Tong, 1998, p. 209).

Thus the “true nature” of a triangle is a difficult thing to pin down: we can describe what it looks like, something about its shape and function and category, but we cannot define it as an essential thing. Putnam Tong (1998) writes: “Just as we have no access to a triangle as it exists in itself, but only to the enormous variety of particular triangles we can conceive of, we have no access to woman as she exists in herself. Yet in the same way we can recognize a triangle, we know a woman when we see one” (p. 209). Though this recognition may be problematic – it is, after all, in recognition that we find interpellation and normalization – recognition is, as Kristeva points to, socially useful. Indeed, “political action requires a platform — some sort of launching pad” (Putnam-Tong, 1998, p. 210) and gender provides a very visible one.

While gender may be an identity based in discourse, performance, and social construction, it is nevertheless an important one, and may serve as an organizational site for social transformation. Gender as approached through this dissertation then is “neither an unproblematic procession from biologically determined sex *nor* an imaginary construct that is purely arbitrary” (Putnam Tong, 1998, p. 209, *italics added*) but a specific and unique subject position. This research focuses on women and women’s experiences so as to honor the differential worlding of gender for men and women, and the ways in which women suffer uniquely in our culture. However, it should not be taken that I believe in any foundational nature, or even value, of gender

as a system of essential identification.

### *The question of agency*

The picture I have painted in the preceding sections threatens to convey a sense of hopelessness, or to overestimate the constructive and constitutive power of discourse. While acknowledging the creative capacities of discourse and the ways in which we are fundamentally built from the culture around us, we must also find some way to explain rebellion, resistance, or difference. After all, people *do* overcome oppression, or express dissenting opinions in unique ways that seem to be genuinely novel. How can this be if we are little more than puppets for the ideologies and discourses we perform?

Though the self may be created and used by discourse, this does not preclude the opportunity for agency or for alternative discourses to arise. Indeed, as the example of gender illustrates, it is precisely because people are founded in the flux of discourse – and not tied to an immutable, internal set of characteristics – that their identities *can* be changed or altered.

Guattari (1995) emphasizes that a discursive view of the self need not be hopeless, but that we may in fact *use* the machinations of cultural production in the service of agency and change. In so doing, Guattari unwittingly provides an excellent description of the work of culture jammers, writing: “technological developments together with social experimentation in these new domains are perhaps capable of leading us out of the current period of oppression and into a post-media era characterized by the reappropriation and resingularisation of the use of media” (Guattari, 1995, p. 5). Guattari stresses that we may use the tools and technologies provided to us in *different and unique* ways, beyond their original intentionality, to affect shifts within the discursive culture.

Butler (1997) echoes a belief in the agency that human subjects can have by resignifying, or ascribing new meanings, to discursive practices and identities. Locating resistance within the psyche, Butler notes that the psyche contains not only the subject – the self which is a product of discursive subjection – but also the *unconscious*. Through the unconscious, psyche “exceeds the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand” (p. 86) with some “psychic remainder [which] signifies the limits of normalization” (p. 88). This remainder – the unconscious – is produced through the failures of discourse and interpellation which, though powerful, are not *totalizing*. As Butler (1997) writes:

“This performative effort of naming can only *attempt* to bring its addressee into being: there is always the risk of a certain *misrecognition*. If one misrecognizes that effort to produce the subject, the production itself falters. The one who is hailed may fail to hear, misread the call, turn the other way, answer to another name, insist on not being addressed that way.” (p. 95, italics original)

Butler points to how the hailing of ideology through interpellation necessarily produces a subject, but it may not always produce the *intended* subject. “Misrecognition” provides some slippage between the call and the answer, and it is in this gap that there may be hope for agentic subjectivity. Because disciplinary power depends on the subject to take up the identities afforded through discourse, disciplinary discourse does not then “unilaterally constitute a subject” because it “*simultaneously* constitutes the condition for the subject’s de-constitution” (Butler, 1997, p. 99, italics original). The power to subvert discourse thus comes from the very structure of discourse itself, and the permeability through which subjects may occupy multiple positions and use

discourse in novel ways.

That a woman may feel herself to be both powerful and objectified, both able to change and yet also a victim of social circumstances is crucial to understanding how this dissertation dialogues with notions of culture and individual. At the crux of my argument is a belief that my participants are both profoundly impacted by and built from our patriarchal culture *as well as* able to resist and change it vis-à-vis culture jamming. Individuals are always undergoing a constant process of interpellation, performing new and old discourses, and able to have some agency *by very virtue* of their fragmented and performative natures. While the view of the constructed self is often painted dismally, with the subject trapped by discourse at every angle, Foucault (1976) carefully notes that this need not be so, writing:

“Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it... discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart.” (p. 100-101)

The fact that discourses are fragile, and subject to the play of time and history, is precisely what enables the jammer to use discourses against themselves, as well as what enables the individual to find freedom from them. Jamming functions in part through “convergence with other discursive regimes whereby inadvertently produced discursive complexity undermines the teleological aims of normalization” (Butler, 1997, p. 93). By synthesizing elements of discourse that are not typically connected – such as corporate advertising and social justice – jammers

highlight the “discursive complexity” already in play in the magazine cover, or Victoria’s Secret ad and thus encourage the viewer to resist a normative reading.

As the work of my participants will hopefully illustrate, the discourses that constitute us are not final, nor are they essential and unable to change. Burr (2003) writes:

“Change is possible because human agents, given the right circumstances, are capable of critically analysing the discourses that frame their lives, and to claim or resist them according to the effects they wish to bring about. ... change is possible through opening up marginalised and repressed discourses, making them available as alternatives from which we may fashion alternative identities.” (p. 122)

Burr’s insights will be particularly important to remember in the Results chapters, as we will see that the notion of access to alternative messages is a key feature of both a more empowered society and the practice of culture jamming. Understanding the self as acting through repetitive citationality and performance certainly does not preclude the ability to act. Rather, a constructivist view highlights the need for more alternative discourses to proliferate so that individuals may be able to embody more subjectivities and produce new realms of experience and experimentation. If we are bound by the discourses that are available to us, yet these discourses are vulnerable and unstable, then we may still have hope of acting agentially and shaping the discourses that shape us.

Having examined how discourse constructs our ideas about selfhood or gender, I would like to zoom out a bit and attend to the important role that discourse will play in what I am defining as a cultural sickness. Understanding culture as a nexus of discourses interacting with the people, landscape, and artifacts of a specific location, it is necessary to briefly pause and operationalize this term of cultural sickness. If cultures are organic entities, imbued by the people who live within them and constantly fluxing and responding to natural as well as social elements, then we could speak of the relative sickness or health of such an entity, and define these terms by the people living within the culture.

For the purpose of this project I am defining a cultural sickness as the thorough dissemination and practice of a network of discourses that serve to systematically oppress certain groups of people — in this case, women — maintain social inequality, and render alternatives invisible (and itself as logical and inevitable). Though there are certainly problems with evoking a medicalizing metaphor of sickness — which I will return to throughout the dissertation — I think that it best captures the profound and infectious way in which harmful ideologies spread and function socially. I believe such a move also represents a subtle but important shift from current thinking about social ‘problems.’

To label sexism a social or cultural problem serves to minimize the seriousness of the issue. Jaywalking is a social problem. The daily objectification, sexualization, and violation of women is not just a problem, it’s a tragedy, and one that unfortunately continues to go under-recognized. By using the language of pathology and therapy, I hope to engage terms that people already understand and take seriously, and use them to suggest the truly foundational nature of the issue.

That is, the way we treat women in this society is not just a problem, not just a neat social issue that one can choose from amongst an array of hobby interests, it is a sickness — a deeply rooted infection rotting in our cultural bones, and one that desperately needs some kind of treatment. When I return to discuss psychology as a field and its related tasks I will unpack the dangers of using a medicalizing discourse further, and explore the limitations of language in more detail.

### *Power/knowledge, normalcy, and the pathological society*

As already explored, discourse creates a scaffolding for our sense of general as well as specific subjectivity within a social “scene of constraint” (Butler, 2004, p. 1). Discourses are not benign and equal, but convey as well as construct ideology and knowledge, which means they always carry with them the practice of power. It is power, and its unequal distribution that is fundamental to my conception of cultural sickness. Primarily drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault, this section will explore how discourse, power, and knowledge function together to form a pathology of normalcy, or a sick society.

Across his body of work, Foucault weaves together ideas of power, knowledge, and normalcy to discuss how discourse operates as a form of social standardization. As we have seen, Althusser (1970) — one of Foucault’s teachers — demonstrated how Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) function by disseminating certain knowledges about what is *normal* and *ideal*. These ideals — which, in our mainstream culture, I will argue are patriarchal and pathological — are then taken up by the individual and used to perpetuate a policing of self and others in accordance with the ideological norm.

Foucault (1975) explores further the insidiousness of ideological power, particularly



illuminating how power can be taken up from discourse, internalized in the subject, and acted out via self-regulating “normalcy.” Foucault traces how surveillance plays an integral role in a new kind of power — disciplinary power — that is established not through violence but through the threat of abnormalcy and social exclusion. Using the idea of the panopticon, or the eye that always sees, Foucault illustrates how the knowing gaze of the Other establishes the norm which “introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences” (p. 184). In line with Foucault, we need look no further than the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, or the latest trending tweets on Twitter to see that there are highly specific and ever expanding instructions that women must heed in order to meet the norm of femininity.

What is crucial to Foucault’s more sophisticated understanding of power, and particularly to how it contributes to the pathological social treatment of women, is that disciplinary power acts through the norm and through discourse but it acts *on* the body. Particularly considering how difficulties with eating and body image may show up as symptoms of a sickness of patriarchy, Foucault’s (1976) conception of “biopower” or the necessity of power acting on and controlling the body, is important to my understanding of cultural sickness.

Foucault (1976) describes that biopower functions by constructing the body as an object and harnessing the “distributive management of its forces” (p. 141) – particularly reproductive capacities — via the disciplinary power of internalized discourse. By regulating and acting upon the body, biopower divorces people from their embodied experience and desires, which makes it easier to gradually introduce ever greater levels of self-regulation and control. Biopower is particularly useful for thinking about the way that normative discourses of femininity encourage women to view their bodies as objects and to constantly be aware of their physical appearance.

Technology that expands the horizons of the panoptic gaze — as all media, but particularly

social media, does exponentially — increases women's sense of being constantly looked at. Through external and internal surveillance, standards for normalcy enable ever more shading of individual differences, which in turn, sediment and strengthen normative discourses. Foucault argues that the typically destructive ways in which we think of power are incorrect, asserting that power is “no longer repressive, but productive; does not say no but yes; does not prevent, but invent” (Caputo & Yount, 1993, p. 8). Through the creation and dissemination of ever more discourses to distinguish and classify human behavior, “normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power” in a disciplinary society (Foucault, 1975, p. 184).

While we might typically think of a sexist society as one in which women are formally denied fundamental rights such as voting and schooling, Foucault encourages us to think about the ways in which our society controls women precisely by allowing them access to social inclusion, but only in certain ways. To deny a person or group rights is one kind of power – force – but force is actually a weak kind of power, and one that Foucault would argue is only used as a last resort. A better, more subtle form of power is that which seems to welcome women, while maintaining inequality through the promotion of certain *ideals*.

That is, we do not pass laws saying women cannot work. Rather, we create discourses that *discourage* women from working certain jobs – jobs with access to higher pay or leadership opportunities especially – or we paint ‘working women’ as a certain, different kind of women than non-working mothers. Further, we continue to structurally and economically pit work against motherhood, while simultaneously insisting that both are essential tasks for women. Women are then forced to make choices and compromises in order to strive to meet the competing ideals of a discourse of ideal femininity, in which motherhood is almost always seen as the most fundamental or important female ability.

Women are told we are welcome to work as equals to men – so long as we continue to meet dozens of other ideals for feminine behavior that function directly in opposition to those ideals needed to succeed in the workplace. This discursive effect means women need not be *formally* excluded from anything, which would only serve to foment anger and create an easily targetable enemy. Instead, women are folded into and come to (more or less) willingly participate in a system of disciplinary power that upholds patriarchal ideals and actually works against their best interests. When discourse works in this subtle fashion, there is no need for a law saying women *can't* work, merely a social system which suggests they probably *shouldn't* work, or at least should do so only if they can also continue to be responsible caretakers for children and meet other competing demands.

Foucault (1972) argues that the gaze of the Other, or the possibility that one is always being watched or surveilled for abnormalcy is precisely how ideological power is transmitted. As in the preceding example, individuals take disciplinary power up and subject themselves to normative discourse. Efficiently then, forceful power becomes a distant threat, rarely exercised. Rather, disciplinary power keeps populations in line, since we perceive the choices we make as freely our own, and we constantly monitor ourselves to make sure we are conforming to social norms.

Foucault (1975) writes: “power produces knowledge....[and] power and knowledge directly imply one another...there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27). By creating certain knowledges about women, we also exercise cultural power *over* women. This power/knowledge that interpellates and disciplines individuals, turning them into subjects struggling to conform to discourses of normalcy is only made possible by a very ordinary nexus of human relations. As I will argue in the Results chapters, power is perhaps most

damningly exercised not in dramatic instances of trauma, but in the grinding, everyday accumulation of inequities, and the constant knowledge that one is trapped, vulnerable, or inadequate.

Foucault's ideas of surveillance and the self that subjugates *herself* help us understand how cultural sicknesses take root in the individual, infecting and pervading via ideology. When this ideology is harmful, as I argue patriarchal ideology is, the results within a society can be devastating. Sexism operates in our society through commonplace discursive practices that naturalize gender roles, and create certain knowledges about women which imply a less powerful social position. I will argue that sexism is not merely a personally biased set of beliefs that an individual or group may have, but actually a cultural sickness stemming from damaging practices of power/knowledge.

Foucault (1975) fundamentally contributes to our understanding of oppression by conceptualizing power not as "a property but as a strategy" (p. 26). Through this seemingly simple statement, Foucault introduces the radical notion that one does not *have* power, but rather one *does* power. Just as Butler argues that gender is not a material, but a performance, so too does Foucault assert that power is not an entity, but a tapping into and acting out of various discourses. Thus power is not localized in guns, or status, or even wealth, but is acted out via the creation of various subjectivities, and all of us, who take up these subjectivities and behave accordingly.

Foucault helps us clarify that it is not that media images, advertisements, and other cultural artifacts of sexism contain some material power, but that they propose a relationship of women to themselves and to others that is limiting. Discourse does not have a kind of 'top down' force, but functions by creating a complex web of strategic practices and kinds of knowledge produced that in turn imply powerful possibilities and limitations for women.

The interworking nature of biopower, power/knowledge, discourse, and normalcy helps us to understand the subtle way in which patriarchal culture exercises power over women. Through the use of media and everyday discourse, we encourage women to view their bodies as objects to control, shape, and minimize, which in turn causes them to enact damaging disciplinary procedures on themselves — monitoring, self-loathing, restricting. As the next section will argue, this self-disciplining and internalized objectification has severe consequences for women's mental health and social welfare.

Importantly, however, disciplinary power requires participation in order to be effective. For discourse to perpetuate itself, we must believe we are willingly participating in the system, or that we are freely choosing (even if we recognize that we are doing so in order to gain or avoid some outcome). Erich Fromm (1955) calls this participation a kind of “*folie a millions*” (p. 15) — a play on the diagnosis of shared psychosis (or *folie a deux*) in which one person begins to believe the delusional ideas of another. When an entire society engages in a belief that is fundamentally pathological, Fromm argues there may develop “socially patterned defects,” (p. 15) that are then able to masquerade as normal, or even ideal. Because sexism pervades our culture so thoroughly, many people fail to see it as unusual, malleable, or harmful. Additionally, many people fail to connect subtle discursive practices to the perpetuation of more structural inequality.

Through the ordinary nature of daily discourse, people who suffer under unjust social structures are often led to believe that this is simply the way things naturally are, or always will be, and so they may not challenge or question systems of oppression. That women do not more often act out against harmful media discourses can be attributed to many factors, perhaps among them, a failure to recognize the cultural sickness of patriarchy for what it is. Due to the constancy and far reach of patriarchal ideology, its power disguises itself, masquerading not only as harmless, but

business as usual. It is this kind of insidious, invisible cultural belief system which disproportionately harms a group of people, that I will argue constitutes a cultural sickness.

Critical philosophers such as Foucault, Fromm, and Althusser offer crucial insights and entry points into theorizing a pathological, or sick society. These thinkers form a foundation for understanding the role of discourse, ideology, and social structures in the life of the individual. They also point to the profound impact that oppressive cultural environments can have on individual health and subjectivity, and encourage us to think differently about the ways in which discourse can perpetuate inequality.

### *Patriarchy and sexism: Feminist accounts from the front lines*

In this dissertation I argue that patriarchy is a kind of cultural sickness, a harmful ideology that suffuses through our culture in such a way that it renders itself invisible and inevitable. This idea follows from not only from a line of critical philosophers, but also from a history of feminist thinkers – more of whom will be explored in the next section – whose important work has explored the influences of patriarchy on our culture and on individual women. This section will briefly review some of the contributions feminist theorists have made to my understanding of sexism as a cultural sickness, as well as how patriarchy — a social belief system in which men hold ultimate authority — continues to affect the lives of women today. I will highlight a few major ways in which women continue to face a hostile cultural climate, as well as briefly detail how women are embedded within a more subtle network of oppressive practices.

Certainly my assertion that patriarchy is a noxious ideology which has negative consequences for women is far from a new one. As early as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft argued

passionately that women's subjugated status in society was not due to an inherent inferiority in women, but to cultural obstacles impeding female advancement. Wollstonecraft called for the removal of such obstacles, particularly women's exclusion from education, and charged that if women were allowed equal access to social rights then individual women would be just as capable as individual men (Ruth, 1998).

Simone De Beauvoir (1949) also began from the premise that living in a patriarchal culture produces noticeable patterns of experience and behavior in women that differ from those of men. De Beauvoir demonstrated how biological assumptions about the nature of egg and sperm have been extrapolated to explain the social natures of women and men. She asserts that it is these discursive arguments stemming from physical sex – not given abilities – that have rendered women as passive and weak, and emphasizes the construction of woman through society as Other (second) and chronically less than.

Though much has changed since the lives of these women, unfortunately many of their insights still ring true. Women have been afforded more legal rights and structural opportunities for social advancement, but De Beauvoir's work still is used and applied by many to illuminate how this advancement has not been commensurate with men's advancement. Though women are now allowed the formal access to education that Wollstonecraft called for, a number of other strategies have cropped up to mitigate women's power in educational realms – including the well observed fact that college campuses now contain some of the highest incidences of rape (Sampson, 2002). Contemporary feminist researchers and theorists still have much to do, precisely because sexism and sexist practices continue to spread throughout our society.

Among the many ways in which women are culturally limited, economic and financial constraints are typically among the most often cited. Though female presence in the work force is

on the rise, women continue to face financial oppression and economic dependence through a number of societal practices. The most egregiously obvious example of economic discrimination is the wage gap, in which women still earn less than men while working the same jobs – roughly 77 cents to the male dollar as of 2009 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

Women face more subtle forms of financial discrimination however, including the feminization of certain jobs and career paths — domestic or administrative work being obvious examples — which are almost invariably jobs of limited pay and means for advancement (Hirsch & Kornrich, 2008). Even as women represent in greater numbers in the workforce, women in leadership positions are still few and far between, and women become less and less visible the higher up the pay scale goes, and the more opportunities for management or leadership increase (Center for American Women and Politics, 2011).

Women also continue to struggle to obtain welfare, child support, and other crucial social benefits commensurate to their unique social needs. Rarely is the fact that it may be difficult for women — particularly those who face additional disadvantages due to race or class — to obtain higher (or even equal) paying jobs considered when assigning welfare, or unemployment benefits. Similarly, the disparate expectations of motherhood versus fatherhood and the nearly sole responsibility that women shoulder for children is not taken into account when awarding social economic benefits such as social security, or insurance benefits (Kail, Quadango, & Keene, 2009).

Perhaps the most alarming evidence of a serious problem in the way that our culture thinks about and treats women is our truly startling rates of violence against women, particularly sexual violence. Though rape has historically served as a tool by which men can terrorize and dominate women, we continue to abject it from our cultural consciousness, and paint it as the deranged act of a violent individual (Herman, 1997).



Over the course of writing this dissertation, at least a half dozen acts of truly egregious violence against women have come to my attention – including the Eliot Rodgers case, in which a young man opened fire on a sorority house in retribution for being sexually rejected, or a series of unrelated but disturbingly similar cases in which high school boys gang raped teenage girls and received protection from their local communities – all of which quickly spiraled into discussions of the perpetrators’ potential diagnoses and troubled family histories. Rarely, if ever, is the social context for rape referred to, and this erasure of the prevalence of violence against women allows for a culture in which sexual violence is quite common.

Accurate statistics for the frequency of rape are difficult to pin down, since women vastly under report incidents, with perhaps only one in every ten rapes actually reported (Clements & Ogle, 2009; Cook, Gidycz, Koss, & Murphy, 2011; Temkin & Krahe, 2008). However, focusing on and fetishizing the number of rapes that *actually* happen — is it one in four (Warsaw, 1994) or one in six (Etaugh & Bridges, 2013)? — only serves to underscore the seriousness of the problem.

Whatever the number of actual rapes is — and even one in twenty would be tragically high! — people doubt it. In fact, reports about and depictions of rape continue to be predominantly characterized by victim blaming, skepticism, and accusations of false claims, despite rape being among the least falsely reported crimes (Belknap, 2010; Weiss, 2009). Rape and the threat of rape exist as a backdrop to women’s experiences. In part, this is because media images, sexual scripts, and dating rituals in our culture all affirm and provide a context for the normalization of rape.

The standard depiction of heterosexual relations suggests that men should be active, advancing partners and women should be passive, coy, or ‘play hard to get.’ This depiction is then elaborated and supported within a multitude of myths about the sexual desires or drives of men and women – including that men have an innately stronger need for sex than women (Wiederman,

2005). This discourse of the male sex drive “not only constructs male sexuality as driven by a biological imperative, but represents women as potential triggers” (Burr, 2003, p. 77) and thus provides much of the scaffolding for a culture of rape apologetics.

As feminist research has proliferated into the 21st century, researchers continue to find, and to highlight, the specific struggles women in the U.S. encounter that American men, or women in other countries may not. Contemporary researchers in depression are forced to take notice that women in the U.S. are twice as likely to be depressed as men, and that this greater prevalence of depression is easily linked to the subjugated status of women in our culture (Edin & Kissane, 2010; Markward & Yegidis, 2011; Pascoe & Smart Richman). Women also over-represent in nearly every diagnostic category, and have some diagnoses virtually all to themselves – anorexia, bulimia, and borderline personality disorder being the most strikingly female dominated diagnoses (Etaugh & Bridges, 2013).

How women are sexualized and objectified in our culture also continues to be a topic of investigation, and researchers are taking ever greater note of the negative effects of media culture on women and girls (cf: Krassas, Blauwkamp & Wesselink, 2001, 2003; Lin, 1997; Plous & Neptune, 1997). The dramatic prevalence of eating disorders in our culture has been clearly linked to cultural forces, specifically, to media exposure and objectification (Jung & Forbes, 2010; Malson & Burns, 2009). One need look no further than Becker, Burwell, Gilman, Herzog, and Hamburg’s groundbreaking (2002) study to find a strong and direct link between the introduction of Western television and the sudden arrival of previously unheard of eating disorders to Fijian culture.

So serious and marked are the objectifying effects of patriarchy that even the American Psychological Association recently formed a task force to investigate and report on the

sexualization of girls in our culture (APA, 2010). Unsurprisingly, the task force presented findings that the sexualization and objectification of girls results in cognitive impairment (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998), emotional distress (Slater & Tiggemann, 2002), and an inability to be assertive (Impett, Schooler & Tolman, 2006). Particularly troubling is a continued finding that objectification is internalized by women, who then objectify themselves (e.g. McKinley & Hyde, 1996), and each other (Eder, 1995; Nichter, 2000).

Of course we see the work of Foucault and Butler mirrored in these contemporary researchers' findings. Women and girls internalize media messages about normal and ideal femininity and act out their subjectivities in accordance. The findings of contemporary feminist researchers should underscore Foucault's assertion that power and knowledge always imply one another. As the APA's Task Force shows, the media messages presented to women and girls limit female experience, embodiment, and consciousness in observable ways. Though APA psychologists may not make the links, media discourse *has* such detrimental effects because of the disciplinary power that Foucault and Butler expound upon, by which girls objectify themselves and take up restrictive subject positions.

Objectification theory, first coined by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), plays a crucial role in establishing a feminist account of cultural sickness and understanding the ways in which media discourse harms women. Fredrickson and Roberts compellingly outline a theory of objectification based on how women serve as sexual objects for the male gaze (e.g. Mulvey, 1975) and how the "subtle and everyday practice of sexual gazing" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175) has significant consequences for how women view themselves. Importantly, Fredrickson and Roberts also make the specific linkage between social objectification and women's mental health, asserting that an internalization of a sexual gaze may account for the overrepresentation of women in certain

diagnostic categories.

Fredrickson and Roberts discuss how sexual evaluation follows women throughout their lives and across social spheres, writing, “The most subtle and deniable way sexual evaluation is enacted — and arguably the most ubiquitous — is through gaze” (p. 175). Fredrickson and Roberts argue that the constant, subtle sexualizing of women through gazing forms the bedrock for a view of women as objects, not people, and paves the way for the mental health discrepancies and violence against women in our society. Additionally, Fredrickson and Roberts highlight how gazing invades female consciousness, leading to constant self-monitoring and intrusive reminders — from others as well as from oneself — to attend to physical appearance.

Fredrickson and Roberts note that “the mass media’s proliferation of sexualized images of the female body is fast and thorough,” and that “confrontations with these images, then, are virtually unavoidable” (p. 77) and bound to impact women in some way. I am continually shocked by the relative unimportance people seem to afford to advertising and media imagery when it comes to their personal lives. Despite the fact that the average American sees upwards of 300 ads a day (Lasn, 1999) I find myself constantly defending to others that of course such images *matter* and that the effect of such visual accumulation is significant, particularly in the lives of women.

Fredrickson and Roberts posit that the subtle sexualization, objectification, and devaluation of women is also fast and thorough in its ability to take hold in women’s minds. Observing that their bodies are rendered as sexualized objects for public consumption, women internalize this discourse from the media and, Fredrickson and Roberts assert, engage in “habitual, self conscious body monitoring” (p. 180) as a result. This constant self monitoring not only divests women of creative and psychic energy, it also results in a disjointed internal experience wherein women are constantly reminded to monitor their appearance, not their internal state.

The cumulative effect of this constant interruption and reminder of one's role as a sexual (or at least, beautiful) object is greater instances of shame and anxiety for women and less internal bodily awareness. Fredrickson and Roberts argue that these experiences in turn lead directly "an array of mental health risks that disproportionately affect women: unipolar depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 173). Their pivotal work supports the metaphor of cultural sickness, situating these disproportionate diagnoses for women as symptoms of a sexist culture, rather than as diseases with etiologies unique to the women who suffer them.

Fredrickson and Roberts' case is persuasive, and marks an important shift towards tying together an oppressive cultural milieu with the individual diagnoses that women are most likely to receive. Their work also helps to unite the sometimes highly theoretical ideas of power/knowledge, discourse, and performance presented in the works of Foucault and Butler with a practical demonstration of how women internalize pathological discourses and regulate themselves to damaging ends.

Lastly, Rowe's (1990) pivotal work exploring gender based micro-inequities or micro-aggressions provides an exceptional look at the way that sexism operates not simply in isolated social spheres, institutions, or groups, but in fact pervades our cultural fabric in subtle, nearly invisible ways. Rowe (1990) asserts that, "mechanisms of prejudice against persons of difference are usually small in nature, but not trivial in effect" and "they are especially powerful taken together" (p. 153), pointing to the cumulative, degrading effects of repetitive (even if minor) instances of inequality.

Defining micro-inequities as "tiny, damaging characteristics of an environment" which "affect a person not indigenous to that environment," (Rowe, 1990, p. 153) Rowe underscores how

the minute nature of micro-aggressions does not detract from, but actually bolsters the amount of damage such instances can do. Because micro-inequities are those very small instances — such as jokes or gestures — that occur selectively to people who are not indigenous, or who do not belong within a given environment, micro-inequities have an effect that is often difficult for those in power to see. Given their minoritarian position in society, women (as well as people of color and other marginalized populations) often find themselves actually alone, or tokenized, particularly in the workplace. More broadly, however, women exist within a culture to which they are not native, or not included as full members.

Rowe (1990) notes that micro-inequities “are distinguished by the fact that for all practical purposes one cannot do anything about them; one cannot take them to court or file a grievance” (p. 157) precisely because those who are unaffected by micro-inequities often fail to see them, or to believe they exist. Focusing on workplace environments, Rowe gives several examples of the kinds of micro-inequities that women may face and demonstrates how these events form a “scaffolding for discrimination in the U.S.” (Rowe, 2008, p. 3). Micro-inequities may include requests for things outside of a job description, like for a female employee to clean up, plan a party, or handle an interpersonal situation, but also even more subtle gestures.

A well qualified woman is passed up for an aggressive sales lead because her boss simply didn't think of her for the position (despite excellent sales number), choosing instead a less experienced but more talkative young man. A male colleague asks a female coworker which tie she thinks his wife might like best, or a female colleague is called over for her ‘expert opinion’ on the behavior of another women in the office. Of course this is to say nothing of the sexist jokes and comments that are routinely a part of our cultural milieu and to which women are expected to grin and be a good sport about, despite the fact that such comments may be annoying or even deeply

offensive. These small and subtle events grate against women every day, but they are instances of sexism for which women have no formal recourse.

Rowe's work points to how the general silencing and erasing of experiences with sexism can be as damaging to women as the ongoing nature of the incidents themselves. The inability to "do anything about" micro-inequities (Rowe, 1990, p. 157) — in part because one is not in an empowered social position, and thus one's concerns are not recognized — lends an extra element of suffering to those who face micro-inequities as part of their daily experience. The silencing and constant derision of women through subtle, seemingly innocent encounters is quite damaging, however, on *both* individual and cultural levels. Rowe (1990) concludes,

"Micro-inequities are fiendishly efficient in perpetuating unequal opportunity, because they are in the air we breathe, in the books we read, in the television we all watch, and because we cannot change the personal characteristic which leads to the inequity.

Micro-inequities are woven into all the threads of our work life and of U.S. education"  
(Rowe, 1990, p. 159)

Indeed, websites like *Everyday Sexism* or the currently trending hashtag #YesAllWomen (a retort to the common dismissal of women's reports of sexism by saying "not all men" behave in sexist ways) exist for the sole purpose of providing a place where women can catalogue the dozens of daily, subtle ways in which they experience discrimination, and the frustrating, cumulative effects. These sites — as well as continued feminist research — thrive not only because instances of sexism are so common, but also because they provide a way to combat the inherent erasure that the minute nature of micro-inequities brings.

Rowe's insights about the surreptitious and everyday nature of sexism and gender-based discrimination are critical to this dissertation, and her ideas provide a framework for understanding patriarchy as a cultural sickness. Rowe, along with the many other important feminist thinkers cited here (who still comprise but a fraction of the community working on these important issues) provide a historical trace from within feminism for thinking sexism as cultural pathology, and will return again in the results chapter to help contextualize the research findings.

The theoretical work of Foucault, alongside the applied research of feminists, beseeches us to attend to the important role of discourse in the creation of individual subjectivities along culturally pathological lines. If we see discourse as the fundamental material from which human beings construct identity, then when discourses imply unequal power relations, the consequences are serious indeed. When cultural discourses are harmful, this is not just a hurtful thing that happens outside of us and we react to, but activates all the quivering mass inside us, built from a thousand commercials and magazine ads, church services and 'hellos' on the street.

Like the water in our bodies responds to the tides of the moon, so do our psyches respond to the tides of culture from which they bear origin. We cannot help but change and reconstruct ourselves as culture shapes and changes, and psychologists are blind if we see self and culture as separate objects that interact with each other, not a fundamental sameness appearing in unique corporealities. If we truly take the role of discourse and social construction in the production of the person seriously, then there is no 'I' and 'culture' as separate entities, merely two bodies with a split soul. The dissertation understands the relation of individual and social as fundamentally intertwined and therefore proposes a revised understanding of individual and cultural sickness, as well as individual and cultural therapy.



## *Encountering feminism*

As noted in the previous section, this dissertation follows in a history of feminism as well as social constructionism, post-structural philosophy, and critical theory. Until now I have used the term feminist unproblematically, but before going any further it should be properly unpacked. Just as gender is a wildly divergent term with many applications and different definitions, feminism is a diverse movement, with people taking up the goals and ideology of feminism in vastly different ways.

Admittedly, I was not sure if this section should even be included here. After all, the question of feminism is one I asked my participants directly: what does it mean, what is it good for, and who is included within it? Yet I identify as a feminist researcher, and position this research as feminist in nature, so I believe it is necessary to give at least a cursory definition of how *I* understand feminism and have been informed by it. This section serves to offer the reader such a definition, and to situate my position as a researcher within the field of feminism.

Feminism is frequently classed into waves (first, second, and third); categories of women (feminists, womanists, lesbian feminists); or by theoretical ascription (radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism). Though there are problems with using any of these categorical heuristics, I believe a theoretical approach is able to best and most efficiently capture what will be pertinent to an understanding of feminism within this dissertation. There are also many more kinds of feminism that I do not cover here — global feminism, ecofeminism, or Marxist feminism to name only a few – and the reader should bear in mind that the feminisms represented here are simply those which most inform this research.

Liberal feminism, arguably the earliest iteration of the feminist movement, has helped

women make great social and political strides, and is probably still the most common form of feminism endorsed today. With a foundation in humanism, and a belief in an androgynous human spirit, liberal feminists argue strongly that women's oppression in society is social in form and call for women to be strictly equal to men (Putnam Tong, 1998).

While liberal feminism has been criticized by those who disagree that men and women are, or should want to be, fundamentally the same, contemporary turns in liberal feminism have worked to highlight women's unique experiences. Focusing predominantly on the rights of women to be *as free as* men – without necessarily implying they should be the same as men – liberal feminists fight for societal equality. Increasingly, they also strive to do so without suggesting that gender is irrelevant, or that men and women should have identical qualities or abilities.

Putnam Tong (1998) writes that at the core, “liberal feminists wish to free women from oppressive gender roles — that is, from those roles used as excuses or justification for giving women a lesser place, or no place at all” (p. 32). Liberal feminism asserts that society foundationally conflates sex with gender and that this confusion continues to funnel women into constrained social positions (Spector Person, 1980). By naturalizing gender roles with appeals to a foundation in physical sex, the “lesser space” of women is naturalized as well, and liberal feminists fight to not only undo the effects of this thinking, but to change the thinking itself.

Though it has sometimes placed the collective good over the value of individual experience and difference, liberal feminism ultimately seeks the advancement of women in a society that has historically erased them. Liberal feminism is also highly pragmatic in its means to change, and seeks greater equality for women by claiming greater visibility, and working towards practical economic and political rights.

This political focus is one that I would like to further, and to promote in this work, hence

liberal feminism serves as an inspiration point in my thinking about women's suffering and social injustice. I applaud the efforts of these historical feminists, and ally with their concern for the currently unequal distribution of power in our society along sex based lines. I also agree with their assessments of the ways in which our culture continues to damage women, and appreciate liberal feminism's ready application to the real experiences of women.

At the same time I also recognize and appreciate the criticisms of liberal feminism, particularly that it stresses sameness rather than difference, and implies — or sometimes outrightly states — that men and women should be not just equal, but equivalent, or exactly the same. I believe the valorization of androgyny present in much of early liberal feminism is an oversimplification, and one that does not rightfully respect the unique qualities produced in men and women by virtue of their — admittedly socially constructed — gendered identities. Additionally, Jagger (1983) argues that liberal feminists, in their eager pursuit of equality, have unknowingly bought into a definition of a universal human that is fundamentally *male* and that prizes masculine values of logic and reason above more typically feminine traits.

I believe these are sound criticisms, and the masculinist, white, educated, and upper class ideals present in much of liberal feminism have also historically rendered it inaccessible to many groups of women (hooks, 1987). However, it is also true that liberal feminism is among the oldest branches of feminism and has had time to reflect on these inadequacies. While critical gaps remain, liberal feminists are making ever greater strides towards inclusion and self-reflection about how, in working through the dominant culture to achieve change, they may also be unwittingly supporting that very same system of dominance.

Working with dominant paradigms and systems is dangerous, and striving to be applicable to women's lives tricky since women obviously vary individually. While it should not serve to

bolster discrimination, it is legitimate to acknowledge that any attempt to achieve certain political measures will likely leave out some. However, liberal feminism's pragmatic aims are necessary ones, and social change *is* needed. While taking seriously the criticisms of liberal feminism and not wishing to erase the unique differences of women, I am nevertheless indebted to liberal feminists intellectually as well as culturally, and liberal feminism forms a strong theoretical support for this project.

Postmodern feminism represents perhaps the opposite end of the spectrum from liberal feminism. Though postmodern feminists also approach gendered distinctions as essentially meaningless outside of the social sphere, they radically celebrate difference, and call not for women to become like men, or for men and women to be the same, but for women's unique perspectives and abilities — which have been historically silenced — to be extolled and valued. Particularly, postmodern feminists assert it is *difference* — which they argue women embody more than men — that should be affirmed most of all.

Stemming from Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism, which highlights how myths about women have been manufactured and proliferated in order to subjugate women as Other (a second sex), postmodern feminists, "take de Beauvoir's understanding of otherness and turn it on its head. Woman is still the other, but rather than interpreting this condition as something to be transcended, postmodern feminists proclaim its advantages" (Putnam Tong, 1998, p. 195).

Using the works of Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan, postmodern feminists explore gender by deconstructing the normative male vs. female supremacy debate, and pointing to the advantages and alternatives presented to one who is excluded or unmarked (e.g. Phelan, 1993). Postmodern feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray stress the role of feminine desire, the multiplicity of feminine sexuality, and the ways in which women embody an importantly different

kind of being than men. They argue that the writings and sexual desires of women proliferate in difference and in non-linear progression, which are needed adjunctives to a masculinist culture that devalues pleasure, beauty, poetry, and *mythos* (Ives, 2010).

Postmodern feminism offers an insightful and philosophically sophisticated means for analyzing and theorizing the female experience outside of a (often implicit) comparison to men. Thinkers such as Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva correct for the sameness that is foundational to liberal feminism, and attempt to define femininity in terms that are positive and novel, as opposed to reactive and formed from an already patriarchal system of language and dominance. Postmodern feminists would argue that liberal feminism not only continues to buy into masculinist ideals, but further concretizes the dominant system by attempting to appeal to patriarchy rather than truly subverting it and they attempt to offer a more fundamental re-arrangement of the systems of gender (Putnam Tong, 1998).

Yet postmodern feminists are not without their critics as well, who charge that the theoretical abstraction which lends postmodern feminism its novelty and flourish is too abstract, and too theoretical. Without some unifying thread amongst women, political action is impossible, and critics of postmodern feminists cite that their theory has become irrelevant to the lives of everyday women. Postmodern feminism faces the very real criticism that it is self-enclosed, a kind of “feminism for academicians” (Putnam Tong, 1998, p. 206) whose thinkers “use language and ideas in such a specific way that no one else can understand what they are doing” (Duchen, 1986, p. 102).

These criticisms of postmodern feminism are quite valid, and I admit even as their prime sympathetic audience — a white, educated, middle upper class female — I have often found myself frustrated with the conceptual flights in the works of Irigaray or Kristeva which, while

fascinating, seem to bear little relevance to the everyday facts of female experience. I agree with, and am interested in, the deconstructions and alternative images of gender that Cixous and Irigaray present when they call for a radical re-arrangement of the values and limits we place on gender identity. However I also often fail to find a way to make these insights applicable or useful to the fact that my female friend was followed home (again) by a man she did not know last night; or that just this afternoon I was forced to sit at a bus stop depicting a nearly naked women sprawled in pool of flesh, her fingers seductively dangling from her mouth (it was advertising tank tops).

Though postmodern and liberal feminisms are extremely different from each other — indeed almost oppositional — it is to these two branches that I find myself most indebted and most informed by as a researcher. I value the work of the postmodern feminists in providing “the most fundamental liberation of all: freedom from oppressive thought” (Putnam Tong, 1998, p. 199) and I hope their work will continue to trickle into and impact more people’s thinking. While postmodernism feminism may not be as readily applicable to the everyday lives of women as liberal feminism, I believe the postmodern feminists offer a different and longer term vision of the future of women’s liberation. As liberal feminism works on the day to day problems of women, postmodern feminism works towards a future in which we understand gender so differently that those problems may not occur.

My inclusion of these two seemingly disparate forms of intervention not only represents how I am informed by various iterations of feminism, but also mimics the focus of my dissertation. That is, I would like to use culture jamming both to theorize a way of treating cultural pathologies so that individual women are ultimately not affected in the ways we see now, *and* to suggest that culture jamming may be helpful in the local and lived instances of individual women’s lives.

Though radical, I have chosen to include postmodern thinkers because I believe in their

ideas, and I would like to further spread and connect them to different fields and audiences.

Consciousness raising and the generation of new ideas and ways of thinking gender and subjectivity is crucial to – indeed, the backbone of – real, lasting political change. The postmodern feminists offer eloquent new ideas which are ripe for sharing and adaptation and may yet lead to a more foundational conceptual change in the ways that we as a culture construct gender.

At the same time, I respect that the radical notions of many of the postmodern feminists are simply unpalatable to many, who can barely conceive of unlinking sex and gender, let alone the complete destruction of a sex and gender based system. While we work towards paradigm changes — by continuing to write and to promote new ideas — women face very real struggles, with very real consequences that cannot be ignored. Thus while I enjoy and hold in high regard the radical bite of postmodern feminists, I must also carry forward the on-the-ground-work of liberal feminists in seeking to advance the political status of women because the situation is dire, and change is desperately needed – at both discursive and day to day levels.

### ***Psychology's tasks: Who's afraid of the big bad world?***

*“My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad.” - Michael Foucault (1983b, p. 231)*

Having reviewed insights from social constructionism, post-structural philosophy, critical, theory, and feminism, what of psychology itself? What can fairly be called “psychology” and what sorts of things ought psychologists to concern themselves with? If psychotherapy is a healing science, how do we define what is therapeutic, and what kinds of healing does psychology

promote? This section briefly explains how I am approaching these important questions, gestures to some of the limitations of traditional psychotherapy, and situates my work within a particular field of psychological research and theory.

Questions of the task of psychology are difficult and complex ones which I have spent much of my graduate training exploring. As in all of the fields of study presented so far, psychology is a diverse field, with many different approaches and different opinions as to what psychologists can and should study. Were we to consult textbooks, we would find definitions purporting psychology to be “the systematic, scientific study of behaviors and mental processes” (Plotnik & Kouyoumdjian, 2010, p. 632) — a stock definition echoed in many texts. In these practices, the goal of psychology is typically identified as an attempt to: “*describe, understand, predict and control* behavior” (Coon & Mitterer, 2008, p. 15, italics original).

Mainstream definitions such as these seek to restrict psychological exploration to the study of people – or at least, their “behaviors and mental processes” – but with a notable emphasis on that which can be observed, extracted, isolated, or quantified. These popular forms of psychology not only focus on individuals – since groups and cultures are much more difficult to study from the perspective of controllable elements – they particularly emphasize what in the individual we can *see* and, as a result, change, control, or adapt.

While a human science understanding of psychology does much to revise the mechanistic understanding of psychological life presented in the mainstream (Sipiora, 2014), unfortunately most of psychotherapy as we employ it still orients around understanding individuals based on their individual lives. Be it through experiences, feelings, thoughts, dreams, memories, or behaviors, we specialize in individuals, and in helping to in some way tame those wild and symptomatic parts of our patients.



Therapists may work with their patients' struggles in a myriad of ways – by understanding them, giving voice to them, processing them, or fixing them (and the fixing itself might include behavioral experimentation, cognitive adjustment, interpersonal coaching, or medication, among other interventions). Across these differences, however, the therapist's task is generally to isolate the individual and in some way help her to change herself.

In addition to the stuff of sessions, how a therapist decides when a patient is “well” differs dramatically based on whose patient she is. To the cognitive therapist, a patient may be seen as cured when she's able to function better at her job and her defective thinking has become more logical and less painful. A psychoanalyst might consider her patient to be better when her unconscious desires have been made conscious, or important material and memories from childhood have risen up and been processed. An interpersonal colleague could terminate with a patient once the fights at home stop, and the patient is better able to negotiate her needs with her husband.

However the theoretical foundations and in session strategies may differ, what we find common to psychotherapy — barring those few emerging radical forms of constructivist or cultural therapies — is an emphasis on the individual and on what we often call self-work. Though outcomes and conversations between patient and therapist may look very different, what is at the heart of nearly every course of psychotherapy is the individual self, reporting for duty to work on herself, faithful therapist at her side.

It bears remarking again at the outset of this section that an individualizing tendency is *typical* but not totalizing of all psychotherapeutic practices. Some forms of therapy, such as Cushman's (1995) ‘moral therapy,’ culturally focused therapies, hermeneutic therapies, and interactionist therapies – such as those argued for by Hillman and Ventura (1992) and Sipiorea

(2014) – *do* attempt to incorporate the world, and to “*expand* the concept of ‘the situation’ in order to include the historical context in which the subject of study is embedded” (Cushman, 1995, p. 283, italics original). These emergent forms of therapy pay respect to the social forces at play in the individual’s life, and aim to understand the interrelation of individual and cultural world. In speaking of therapy generally, it is not my intention to cover over the important work of these therapists and theorists, who form a foundation for this dissertation, and whose work I hope to advance through my research here.

However, it is also the case that these radical forms of therapy are the minority in the mainstream and that psychotherapy as a general practice is still highly individualistic. Further, if we take seriously the intertwined nature of the individual and culture, and if some problems that we currently think of as individual in nature may actually be social in etiology, then therapy may be limited in its ability to address these problems due to its individual format of conversation (and most typically, one on one conversation). My point in this section is not to deride therapists, or the practice of therapy, but rather to point to ways in which clinicians should be careful to not treat their patients for individual problems that may in fact be socially caused.

If the border wars between subfields of psychology and psychotherapy have been fierce, those between sociology and psychology have been even more so. Questions of how to understand the relationships between individuals and groups, and who should address these relationships, have been ongoing between sociology and psychology. Since both fields focus on understanding human experience and life, psychologists have often distinguished ourselves from our sociological cousins by an individualist bent: we study human beings... but not in groups, societies, or cultures, which we relegate to other fields.

Even in those kinds of mainstream psychology that explicitly speak to group or cultural

dynamics – such as social psychology, or group therapy – the relationship of the individual and the larger culture is often strangely inverted. That is, we understand the culture, the social group, or the family as a kind of individual writ large: the sum or the amalgamation of the individuals present within group, or the result of individual tendencies within the group being amplified.

Rather than taking our understanding of the culture and applying these insights to the formation of the individual, we take what we presume to know about the formation of the individual and assume a similar development and set of processes or dynamics to be present in the culture. The individual is so centralized that even when traditional psychology attends to groups of people, we typically frame our understandings in terms of how individuals can constellate the world... but not how the world can constellate individuals.

I must confess that even in this work, where I have tried so hard to reverse the individualizing tendencies of my field and to draw attention to the ways in which the social world impacts the individual, I am showing my pedigree. In talking about a cultural sickness, I recognize that I am sharing psychology's penchant for transplanting features of the individual onto the group, metaphorizing the culture as a kind of individual entity which can get sick (like a person). This, it seems, may be an unfortunate by-product of using language.

After all, I cannot deny that if I argue individuals are foundationally constructed from their cultures so too am I constructed by *my* cultural context – including my historical and academic context. I am bound by the terms available to me, and though they are problematic, I have chosen to use these terms because they are ones that people understand and take seriously – both within and beyond the field of psychology – and because I wish to speak and be heard. Though I strive to emphasize the interrelated nature of culture and individual throughout this work, and to not continue to contribute to a psychological understanding of groups as fundamentally patterned from

individual structures, there are some restraints that language will always impose. Throughout this dissertation I will engage with several of the problematic terms of my field – pathology, therapy, healing, trauma, and sickness among them – and must recognize that in so doing I enter into a discourse beyond my intentionality, one that is heavy with historical meanings.

As asserted in the preceding section on gender, my use of normative and loaded terms should not be taken as an endorsement of them, and I do understand the complex problems that arise from talking about sicknesses, of either individuals or cultures. I cannot solve these problems within the pages of this dissertation, so must settle for using the terms that have been given to me, and which I hope to repurpose and use differently than they have been traditionally applied. Understanding that terms like pathology, therapy, and treatment have complicated histories and complicated issues with their use, I nevertheless choose to use them and to highlight, rather than attempt to solve the tension between eschewing these mainstream discourses and working within them.

As I have already noted in my exploration and inclusion of the radically different liberal and postmodern feminisms, this tension between working within a problematic system or refusing to participate in it is an ongoing and important one to me, and one that is perhaps thematic of this dissertation, and of my engagement with psychology as well. I come from this field, and I wish to further it – *by way of* critiquing and using the terms of psychology to help deconstruct our own practices, and potential limitations. The criticisms of psychotherapy that I will raise in the following pages are not intended to devalue therapy, nor to construct it as a worthless practice, but are a labor of love, meant to strengthen our field by way of owning up to our limitations and exploring further ways in which we can contribute to healing.

Part of psychology's contemporary focus on individual healing can be seen in our very

origins as a field. Herman (1997) points out how Freud's initial conceptions of hysteria placed responsibility squarely in the social sphere, positing that female patients' symptoms were founded in social situations of abuse and unequal power — particularly the rampant sexual abuse of young girls. However, Freud's early analysis was quickly revised due to public outcry, and the social suffering of women was transformed into repressed desire, and individual mental illness. That is, what *was* an interaction characterized in terms of the social influence on an individual became recast in terms of an individual's (desired) ability to influence the social.

A trend towards focusing on and extrapolating from the individual – regardless of the potential social roots of the problem – has continued, and psychology as a field has made a name for itself in understanding and treating the individual, not as a product of her society, but as “the center of the universe” (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p. 120), with little acknowledgment of the way the world constitutes her being. Early pioneers such as Brueur, Freud, and even Jung's treatments were always dyadic and individual in nature: women were seen by the doctors one on one and the treasure trove of healing was discovered to lie inside their heads. In many ways, pervasive sexism and blaming of women permeated these treatments, as the ongoing negative (and feminine) associations to terms like “hysteria” persist and attest to today.

Yet for all their obtuse and often contextually thoughtless theorizing, the early psychoanalysts were among the first clinicians to actually attempt to analyze the greater context of a person's life. These early practitioners were willing to see the ways in which family dynamics and discourses of identity are handed to and taken up by us. Though the conclusions they draw can at times be just as stifling, isolated, or objectifying as any other stream of psychology, psychoanalysis was the first to address the potential of the social field to impact individual health and this forgotten history is one worth noting, and reviving.

As psychological treatment has moved away from deeper exploration, and towards symptom alleviation and helping individuals to manage and control themselves, however, it has become increasingly difficult and inefficient to address the social impact of a patient's ongoing problems. Since social elements are trickier to extract, quantify, or evaluate in a measurable way, addressing them as meaningful components of individual change has increasingly fallen out of favor, particularly as evidence based research and practice has taken sway.

Sipiora (2014) raises the incisive criticism that without properly viewing the deteriorating world crumbling around our patients, psychotherapists may simply help “the successful remain successful while compensating for the cost of that success” (p. 17). That is, we help our patients cope, adapt to, reframe, or feel better about the world around them — but not to change it. When they inevitably fail to meet the world's demands, we prop up our patients' depression, anxiety, or disordered eating as individual problems, or failings, not as symptoms of a “world-soul's sickness” (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p. 232). If we take seriously the insights of Butler, Foucault, Althusser, and the other thinkers already discussed, however, then the way in which we typically address patients becomes highly problematic. Drawing from these thinkers, as well as contemporary cultural psychologists, I assert that understanding and helping people to the best of our abilities *means* helping the culture they live in to provide better options for them.

If we are performing our selves and identities all the time from the discourses available to us, then the traditional view that psychology takes of the self, living inside the person and able to be worked upon, is fundamentally flawed. If we ask patients to recall or discuss moments in their lives, or things that have happened to them, we presume that they were the same person in that moment as they are here with us, or that their representation of events allows us some access to their private world. Further, we assume that if we tinker in that world, we can then expect to see the

effects ripple throughout the patient's life. However, as I have already argued, this view of therapy relies on a thoroughly modern notion of the self, and disregards the different ways in which the patient might perform herself in the therapy room and in the world, or be trapped by discursive construction.

Foucault (1965) would also argue that this traditional view of psychotherapy disregards the power/knowledge wielded by the therapist, and the role that we as psychotherapists play in branding our patients as abnormal. If discourses of normalcy police and persuade us to adjust our behavior towards a standardized ideal, there are perhaps none more guilty than therapists of encouraging and proliferating these discourses. When we encourage our female patients to view their problems solely as a result of their own faulty dispositions or families, psychotherapists construct women into particular subjects.

As the previous sections have hopefully illuminated, subjection via discourse has powerful implications, and therapists often unwittingly participate in normative systems of power by shifting attention *away* from systemic inequalities and *towards* individual dynamics or deficiencies. In so doing – even if unknowingly – we support oppressive systems of power and collude in the subjugation of women. Foucault (1965) would also particularly point out that though it may be unintentional on the part of practitioners, the support of the status quo vis-à-vis psychotherapy is no accident – indeed Foucault asserts that psychology is among the many branches which work to bring individual bodies and subjectivities under social control by normalizing and regulating them.

While obviously people have struggles that are unique to their personal backgrounds and histories, Hillman (1992) points out that “patients are *patients* and not citizens, first because they are trapped in transference, then because they are trapped in doctrinal compliance that reduces

them to childhood, and not the least, because they are trapped in therapeutic language” (p. 136, italics added). In line with a Foucauldian view, we would of course expect then for our patients present their problems as facets of their individual lives, because this is the subject position the therapy situation encourages them to inhabit and the explanation they are encouraged to produce. That patients do not more often emphasize the social contributions to their problems is certainly an effect of discourse, but it is also an effect of the therapist’s choices. By asking questions about, connecting to, or focusing on domains other than the sociopolitical – family dynamics, cognitions, or behaviors, for example – we are still actively encouraging our patients to frame their troubles in a particular light; just not a political one.

According to Hillman and Ventura (1992), we’ve had a hundred years of psychotherapy, and the world has only gotten worse. Highly critical of the way that therapy suppresses political rage and further isolates the individual from the community, Hillman and Ventura point out that the “processing” that happens in therapy may just be a kind of “repression in disguise” (p. 31). Hillman and Ventura charge that by ‘processing’ reactions into emotions, therapy represses the patient’s awareness of her social *and* individual condition, as well as how these two conditions are related. In line with Foucault’s conception of power/knowledge, Hillman and Ventura critique how the knowledge that therapy creates about patients – that they *are* patients, that they *have* illnesses, that their experiences need to be *processed* – often goes hand in hand with power relations that serve to uphold the status quo, and to repress the patient’s dissatisfaction with the discursive possibilities open to her.

Hillman & Ventura (1992) write: “psychotherapy is only working on that ‘inside’ soul. By removing the soul from the world and not recognizing that the soul is also *in* the world, psychotherapy can’t do its job anymore” (p. 4) Because most kinds of therapy are still stuck in a



paradigm of opposition between the world outside and the self inside, change is approached in an oppositional manner: the task of the self to *master* the world, manage her emotions, or control her behaviors. However, this often simply serves to move the problems of the world inside the patient, without recognizing the ways in which the patient is inside the world, and constantly being created *by* the world.

When we see identity as separate from culture, we fail to understand that “certain kinds of interpellations *confer* identity,” and that if those interpellations are damaging, then “those injurious interpellations will constitute identity *through* injury” (Butler, 1997, p. 104-105, italics added). As Hillman and Ventura note, “the buildings are sick, the institutions are sick, the banking system’s sick, the school, the streets — the sickness is out *there*” (p. 4, italics original) and we cannot cure individuals of sicknesses that in fact are products of a larger problem.

Worse than simply being unable to address the problem, Hillman and Ventura, along with Cushman and Sipiora, detail ways in which traditional psychotherapy may actually *harm* patients by reinforcing an individual rather than a cultural framework for transformation. When we work at the individual level at the expense of understanding cultural impact and sociopolitical context, we may serve to further silence important parts of our patient’s experience. Hillman (1992) writes that often:

“The distortion of communication, the sense of harassment and alienation, the deprivation of intimacy with the immediate environment, the feelings of false values and inner worthlessness experienced relentlessly in our communal habitation are *realistic appraisals* and not merely apperceptions of our intra-subjective selves.” (p. 93, italics added)

When we thusly transform our patient's sense that something is wrong into a personal task to work on together, we not only thwart the opportunity for a greater understanding of the intertwining of individual and culture, we potentially make our patients feel worse by attributing their distress to *them*, rather than to the sick and deteriorating world in which they live.

Cushman's thorough historical analysis of psychotherapy in America reveals that unfortunately many therapies, "however effective in producing behavioral change or emotional experiences in the short run, inevitably reproduce the very causes of the ills they treat by implicitly valorizing and reproducing the isolated, empty individual" (Cushman, 1995, p. 7). Cushman (1995) points out that "psychotherapy not only reflects, but constructs the social field" (p. 2) and underscores how the intensifying of individualist culture and the rise of psychology have not been coincidental but deeply interrelated.

Calling psychotherapy part of the "lifestyle solution" (Cushman, 1995 p. 80) Cushman details how therapy may function as an individual stopgap, but structurally actually reinforces the essential struggles of an unequal, capitalist culture, in which individuals lack a sense of community, passion, or purpose. While psychotherapy purports and attempts to heal, it unfortunately often simply mimics the conditions of oppression that clients face in society, and "unknowingly collud[es] with negative aspects of the status quo" in a number of ways, including:

"Ignoring the psychological effects of current political structures (and thereby blaming the victim); unquestioningly accepting distinctions such as inner-out, mind-body, and individual-society; employing psychotherapy theories that are based on a consumer metaphor (such as object relations theory); adhering to unquestioned gender or racial prescriptions; enacting unquestioned role prescriptions such as that between doctor and

patient; and enforcing the power relations of class” (Cushman, 1993, 290-291)

Though again different versions of psychotherapy enact these damaging practices to greater or lesser degrees, most iterations of traditional therapy – barring those innovative practices being brought forth by Cushman and other cultural, constructivist, and hermeneutic therapists – work to some degree to uphold the status quo, even if unknowingly. Hillman (1992) provocatively charges:

“If therapy imagines its task to be that of helping people cope (and not to protest), to adapt (and not to rebel), to normalize their oddity, and to accept themselves ‘and work within your situation, make it work for you’ (rather than refuse the unacceptable), then therapy is collaborating with what the State wants: docile plebes” (p. 156)

If indeed “therapy deals with things that are not right,” (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p. 218) Hillman asserts that we must concern ourselves with “dysfunction.” But whose dysfunction? While most therapists view the task of psychology as helping the patient with her personal dysfunction – even if it may be caused by outside sources – I will argue that we should not only help our patients’ to see the broader context of their personal dysfunction, but also work to alleviate the world’s dysfunction that shows itself in our patients.

Hillman asserts that for the most part, we as psychologists fail to locate the dysfunction of our patients correctly. In so doing, we necessarily fail in our cures and our attempts to help patients, because we often both fail to see the important role of environment, *and* how seriously sick the environment is becoming. Hillman and Ventura (1992) write:

“It is the civilization that is dysfunctional. The society is dysfunctional. The political process is dysfunctional. And we have to work on cures that are beyond *my* cure. That’s revolution. That’s realizing that things out there are dysfunctional. That’s the therapeutic task. It’s not to tell a person how to fight or where to fight, but the awareness of dysfunction in society in the outer world.” (p. 219)

As I will discuss more fully in the final Results chapter, therapy might reimagine its task not as helping the individual to better normalize herself and adapt to the performances demanded of her, but as attempting to increase the patient’s awareness of the political implications of her suffering, as well as the ways in which she is socially constituted. Demonstrating the somewhat ludicrous, but usually unquestionably endorsed suggestion that therapy can help with any problem, Hillman & Ventura criticize how therapy could possibly do such a thing in the face of an oppressive social landscape:

“[A place] where the school isn’t right for my kids, where the food I eat is not right, where the air I breathe is not right, where the architecture in which I spend my time assaults me, the lighting and the chairs and the smells and the plastic are not right. Where the words that I hear on TV and are printed in the newspaper are lies, where the people who are in charge of things are not right because they are hypocritical and hiding what they are really doing – so how can I ever get it right within my home and within my marriage?... You can’t sign a peace treaty with society through therapy.” (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p. 219)

As Cushman, Hillman, Ventura, and Sipiora point out, “contemporary psychotherapy operates in a world gone mad” (Sipiora, 2014, p. 4) – a world that is nevertheless almost entirely left out of most therapy rooms. Too often we attempt to somehow mediate or negotiate the individual’s relationship with the world by only working with half of the equation. In so doing we not only often fail at the task, since we are not considering the entirety of the picture, but we also continue to sediment a discourse of self as separate from the world.

Again, Foucault would urge us to not simply look at what therapy is failing to do by leaving out the world, but what it is in fact succeeding in doing by such an omission. The production of individual ails (and patients) means that individuals are responsible for their troubles, not the world itself. When people feel dissatisfied, upset, or angry, they know to go to therapy now, and we as therapists are often all too willing to funnel their feelings into narratives about their family histories or distorted thoughts, *not* to attend to how these feelings may be “realistic appraisals and not merely apperceptions of our intra-subjective selves” (Hillman, 1992, p. 93).

My intention here is not at all to vilify psychotherapists, almost all of whom are extremely well intentioned and a great many of whom are ever striving to better understand how to help their patients – some by including a social focus. It is certainly not my belief that the traditional focus on the individual in psychotherapy is sinister in any way, and I understand it is a pragmatic move — we want people to feel better, after all. It’s difficult to change the world, and nearly impossible to decide what even needs to be done to change it. What we can do, therapy professes, is at least help people to learn to deal with the world better, to “work within your situation [and] make it work for you” (Hillman, 1992, p. 156). But in trying to help, we may be blinding ourselves to the true nature of our patients’ problems or worse, actually hurting, rather than helping them. What might the field look like if we changed our focus to helping patients see their situations in terms of political

inequality, and if we aimed our therapies at a sick culture rather than just treating sick citizens?

While I am certainly not advocating for a wholesale abandonment of therapy, I do think it is necessary to honestly examine what therapy does for (and to) people — both positively and negatively — as well as what it does not do. The private space of therapy is essential for many kinds of healing – within the confidentiality of the consulting room, individuals are free to share their experiences without fear of judgment or reprisal. Because of the intimate format of therapy, individuals are able to form a connection with a single, important other, and to have novel interpersonal experiences with that other. Psychotherapy is also perfectly suited for working on the intra-psychic dimension of a person’s suffering and for helping individuals to explore their psychic constellation and the ways in which they particularly influence their lives.

Most kinds of psychotherapy are not particularly well suited, however, to helping individuals see the ways in which their lives are influenced and constellated by forces outside of themselves. Again while some forms of therapy – such as those argued for by Cushman, Sapiro, Hillman, and Ventura, among others – may help to reorient the patient in this manner and to see herself within a broader context, such practices are unfortunately rare. Additionally, the one to one format of therapy – while beneficial for some problems – may structurally reinforce an individualizing tendency that improperly situates the responsibility for some problems, which may be cultural in nature.

Further, if the problem is beyond the patient, in the social world that exists outside of her, then there is only so much that can be done in the one to one format of therapy, and I will argue that in order to truly help our patients – especially our female patients – we as clinicians must deliver our therapy not only to individuals, but to the culture as well. As Hillman and Ventura (1992) point out, “what you learn in therapist is mainly feeling skills, how to really remember, how to let

fantasy come... but you don't learn *political skills*" (p. 6 italics added), skills which are badly needed in a politically hostile climate.

Therapy is a unique practice which cannot, nor should it aspire to do all things for all people. My argument is not that therapy should become an inherently political practice, nor that creative activism should replace therapy, but that therapists should be willing to accept and delineate which problems psychotherapy is good for, and which it is not. Where there are problems that psychotherapy may not be good for – i.e. cultural sicknesses instead of individual ones – I argue that therapists should then also be willing to turn their attention to the true causes of these cultural problems, and to administer cultural therapeutics as well as individual therapeutics.

While not discrediting the valiant strides of those psychotherapists who may practice in a manner that includes the social, the typical way in which our field addresses the relationship between world and woman seems, at the very least, limited, and may in fact sometimes be dangerously colluding with harmful social forces and practices. Though this collusion is detrimental for any patient, a trend towards individualizing problems that are systemic in nature is particularly damaging for women, who already tend to internalize and individualize problems. One of the goals of this dissertation is to further raise clinical awareness regarding the ways in which both therapists and patients are being (ab)used by discourses of power, and to begin reorienting our treatments towards greater liberation for all.

This research fits in with psychology's aim to better understand humans and human experience, but rejects individualizing and isolating tendencies in the field, be they to exist solely in the head, to focus only on symptom alleviation, or to understand people as intrinsically separate from the world around them. Especially strongly rejected is the notion that individuals must change only themselves in order to feel or live better, or that changing society is not for

psychologists to concern themselves with. These notions not only support arbitrary and unhelpful divisions between fields of psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and feminism, but also serve to reinforce dominant discourses and structures of power.

Individually focused treatments may be a well intentioned attempt to respect each person's unique nature, or a despairing surrender to the unchangeability of macro social systems, but in any case, the result is often the same: we miss the forest for the trees. Or, perhaps more accurately, we consume ourselves so much with the burning of a tree that we fail to see it is lit from a forest on fire. Perhaps in order for us to truly heal and help our patients, we must paradoxically *not* simply focus on them, but expand our gaze outward to change the things that are hurting them in the first place. Though there are ways in which we can amend our therapies to include more insights from the cultural psychologists reviewed here, it is my primary argument that we must aim our cures elsewhere in addition to the individual, and work towards cultural, as well as individual, change in order to promote health. If we understand how pathological discourse is internalized and interacts with individuals, then in order to treat individual sicknesses, we need to also treat cultural sicknesses.

This particular research allies with those kinds of psychology seeking to restore the person to a lived world and not to isolate what is psychological to merely what is individual or internal. I draw from a growing field of cultural psychologists (such as Hillman, Cushman, and Sipiora), who advocate for radicalizing therapy and re-imagining the therapeutic situation, as well as critical philosophers (such as Foucault and Butler), who emphasize the important role of discourse and cultural creation.

Rather than supplanting the field of psychotherapy, I will argue for cross-fertilization between the fields of creative activism and psychotherapy, and for a recognition of the shared



goals – though different practices – of many therapists and culture jammers. I also hope to build upon the admirable work of the cultural psychologists I have reviewed here – along with other feminist, constructivist, and interactionist therapists – who urge for greater inclusion of the cultural field in the therapy room, and greater recognition from therapists of the limits of therapy itself. Lastly, I hope to demonstrate to therapists the ways in which culture jammers may provide a novel means for individuals to engage with culture in a manner that is healing, both for the individual and for the culture.

With hesitancy, I feel I must offer a definition of my central terms, cultural sickness and cultural therapeutic, before departing this section entirely. Again, I find myself trapped – to begin to define sickness one must conjure hundreds of years of practice – medical, psychological, spiritual – and the use of such a term will always be complicated. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I am understanding pathology as that which limits, restricts, or only destroys; that is, for something to be pathological, it is something that lessens the ability to move, speak, have options, and be flexible.

In the case of cultures, I am defining cultural sickness as the widespread dissemination and practice of a set of discourses that selectively renders certain individuals or groups less able to speak, be recognized, feel safe, or be empowered to occupy new subject positions. Specifically, I am asserting that patriarchy constitutes a cultural sickness insofar as it encourages a pathological attitude towards women – a cultural nexus of beliefs and practices that serve to subordinate, disempower, and make women feel vulnerable – which at the same time is rendered invisible and normal.

Oppositionally, I would like to define a concept, action, or material as therapeutic when it helps another to feel more free and able to move in her world: to make different decisions, occupy

different positions, speak different truths, or move in different spaces. Typically we think of therapeutics only within the individual framework, but I would like to propose within this dissertation the notion of a cultural therapeutic. Such a therapeutic could be defined as an action, directed towards the culture at large, that intends to help the culture to provide and embody more alternative discourses, allow more people access to speaking rights, and establish greater levels of felt safety, empowerment, and inclusion for its members.

It bears noting that the freedom I am advocating for is *not* a total or an all encompassing freedom – the freedom for anyone to do anything at any time. The freedom to rape, to harass, and to denigrate indeed are freedoms I am fighting actively *against* and so I engage this term of freedom with some caution. What I am not advocating for is the removal of all limits in society by any means, but rather a reflection on what the limits are, why they are there, and how they function. I would like not to obliterate the notion of limits, but rather to highlight the ways in which certain limits restrict some much more than others (to a pathological degree) and begin to shift the limits such that those restricted might enjoy greater access. Of course it is not my assumption that such a shift would occur unproblematically, nor that it would bring about a new freedom that had no unexpected impositions and restrictions. Any change brings with it only perhaps a temporary alleviation to the discursive situation, and we must expect that power will always reassemble and reassert itself in new and different ways.

Rather than attempting to eradicate or ultimately outfox the machinations of power, I am instead arguing that we must be reflective and reflexive about these machinations, must recognize that they exist, and must work to reorganize them in different ways (for as long as we are able). Thus my idea of what is therapeutic should not be mistaken for either an anarchic freedom or a utopian view of healing, in which suffering can once and for all be solved or cured. Rather, I will

argue that creative activism functions as a cultural therapeutic insofar as it helps women to be aware of, and respond to, the limits of their social situations in novel ways which allow for a greater sense of freedom, and an ability to think and move in new and different ways.

## **Review of the literature**

In beginning a review of the literature surrounding this research, arbitrary divisions become an unfortunate necessity. Having used the previous chapter to define important terms and situate the research within a theoretical framework, I will restrict this review somewhat more narrowly. The concepts and thinkers in the previous chapter provide a discursive history for this research and for theorizing cultural sickness, while this chapter serves to give a specific and contextual history to the project of culture jamming itself.

In this chapter I will provide a brief summary of the work of a few feminist artists whose efforts I believe provide a historical scaffolding for the practice of contemporary feminist culture jammers, as well as a review of the current literature on the practice of culture jamming itself. In so doing, I hope to illuminate what has already been written on the topic of culture jamming as well as to demonstrate the gaps which exist in the literature and that point to the need for psychological, philosophical, and feminist readings of culture jamming.

### ***Feminist artists***

Understanding there are many divergent art cultures and that the works of feminist artists are vast, I have chosen a few feminist artists whose work I believe crucially sets the stage for feminist culture jamming. These artists by no means form a conclusive canon of those whose work may be relevant to the practice of jamming. Rather, the artists reviewed here were selected to represent important moments within the feminist art movement which connect with and make way for culture jamming. By working with issues of voice, identity, public messaging, and social

justice, Judy Chicago, Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer, and Barbara Kruger in particular have used their art as aggressive activism and thus are important to understanding the trace of culture jamming through aesthetic history.

Judy Chicago, one of the pioneers of the feminist art movement in the 1970's, focused on making art to celebrate women's unique talents and abilities, elevate women artists, and promote greater visibility of women. Best known for her masterwork, *The Dinner Party*, a massive installation of place settings for 39 mythical and historical women — and including the names of 999 additional honorees — Chicago is chiefly concerned about the representation and silencing of women and women's strengths.

Reputed to have coined the term “feminist art,” Chicago was a leader in exposing women's voices and creating women-only spaces for the promotion of women's art and education (Wylder & Lippard, 1999). Chicago made important strides for women in the art world, including opening Womanhouse, the first exhibition space designed specifically to display works depicting women's points of view in art. Chicago is also the co-founder of the Women's Building, a space for women to explore feminine identity through art, as well as a place for women to learn both traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine arts (i.e. needlework, welding, textiles, pyrotechnics, etc) (Chicago, 1973).

A crucial move at the time, *The Dinner Party* was meant to call attention to the exclusion of women from the historical record, create space for women's unique history within the art world, and raise up women as figures of power (Chicago, 1973). While *The Dinner Party* is rife with many of the issues of early feminist movements — essentializing the nature of women, erasing women of color, reifying female biology — Chicago's work in establishing a feminist art program, and insistence that women be included and valued in mainstream discourse, makes her an

important figure for consideration.

Additionally, *The Dinner Party* sets the stage for the work of culture jamming by providing a kind of playful poke at, or a reframing of a typically masculinist scene. Using the iconography of *The Last Supper* but choosing a radically different position from which to approach it, Chicago highlights an alternative reading of art history, creating a hagiography of women rather than men. *The Dinner Party* interestingly capitalizes on a key feature of culture jamming, the idea of *détournement*, or a repurposing of elements to evoke a second look, or a double take. Though different than the *détournement* of jammers – which aims for a more literal surprise – Chicago’s subversive use of traditional, masculinist iconography towards re-imagined feminist ends bears a familial resemblance to the creative activism of culture jammers.

Artist Cindy Sherman also takes up issues of women’s representation and identity, though in very different ways than Chicago. Using her own body as a canvas, Sherman’s work has generally focused around disguising, dressing up, pretending, or putting on new identities and ways of being. Whether as a bus rider, movie star caught in a still, Hampton type, Renaissance painter, or horrifying phantasmagoric being part prosthetic and part flesh, Sherman reinvents herself again and again, photographing and displaying the new depths she finds in each new performance (Sherman, 2006).

In her work, Sherman actively destroys the notion of the female body as holy vessel or beautiful object, frequently making herself grotesque, disgusting, or difficult to look at. In her later work with masks and dolls, genitals and sexual identities are often mutilated, bound up together, or transmogrified in strange and disturbing ways. Sherman’s work attempts to deconstruct the equation of women with beauty, gentility, softness, or passivity by aggressively asserting many different kinds of femininity with her very own body. However, Sherman’s work also aims to

make its message clear and its evocative punch fierce. Sherman remarks:

“When I was in school I was getting disgusted with the attitude of art being so religious or sacred, so I wanted to make something which people could relate to without having to read a book about it first. So that anybody off the street could appreciate it, even if they couldn’t fully understand it; they could still get something out of it. That’s the reason I wanted to imitate something out of the culture, and also make fun of the culture while I was doing it” (Sherman quoted in Nairne, 1987, p. 132)

This notion of art for the people, or art that speaks to the masses and also pokes fun at the culture is a particularly important insight, and one that culture jamming primarily capitalizes on. Again, though the way in which culture jammers work is slightly different, Sherman’s exaggeration of the tools and images of culture in order to convey some covered over truth is similar to the core goals of most jammers. By using provocative imagery and easy to understand messaging, Sherman led the way for the kinds of creative tactics that my participants and many other culture jammers today use to move towards social change.

Intent on making thought provoking messages accessible, Jenny Holzer uses everyday and mass media platforms such as billboards, benches, or buildings to project simple, but startling messages. With her ‘truisms’ and ‘mock clichés’ such as “Abuse of power comes as no surprise,” “Raise boys and girls the same way,” or “Go where people sleep and see if they’re safe” running across electronic boards at baseball games, on leaderboards at movie theaters, or on baggage claim announcement screens, Holzer’s work interrupts the daily pattern of people’s life with a short, shocking statement (Waldman, 1997).

Holzer's work as an artist is particularly unique in that she uses language, rather than image, as her primary medium and designs her work for public consumption (though many of her pieces also remain predominantly on permanent display in museums). Like Sherman, though pushing the public envelope even further, Holzer notes, "I wanted to see if I could make anything that would be of use to or have some kind of meaning for a general audience, people on their way to lunch who didn't care anything about art" (Holzer quoted in Waldman, 1997, p. 31). Again this focus on the functionality and availability of artistic messages for the public is an important concept common to both Holzer's work and the work of culture jammers. Holzer also engages the social world outside of just the body-based identity, exploring themes of social justice, exploitation, gender, motherhood, and war and illustrating how these forces crucially shape the lived experience of individuals, particularly women.

Holzer's use of public space, accessible and emphatic language, and focus on themes of social justice *through* individual experience and engagement render her artwork quite close to that of culture jamming. Indeed, Holzer's early work — printing her mock clichés on t-shirts and hats, or wheatpasting truisms around New York City — may well be considered creative activism, though her later work marks a return to the gallery and the more enclosed spaces of the art world.

Of course for some artists, public messaging is a primary motivation. There are a handful of feminist artists who work primarily through public space, such as billboards, and who come the closest to and no doubt made space for the actions of feminist culture jammers working now. The Guerrilla Girls, anonymous women who dress in gorilla masks and protest the paucity of female representation in the art world, are most famous for their billboards, which raise alarming questions such as "Do women have to be naked to get into the MET [Metropolitan Museum of Art]?" and point to statistics on the number of female artists represented in museums versus female



nudes.

Keeping their own identities unknown (in addition to always appearing masked in public, the Guerrilla Girls also adopt pseudonyms of famous female artists), the Guerrilla Girls uniquely challenge the erasure and underrepresentation of women with highly visible billboards and flashy action interventions at museums. In their billboards and actions, as well as by pairing their anonymous identities with large scale, eye-catching acts, the Guerrilla Girls highlight cultural tensions surrounding the (in)visibility of women. The Girls' work also takes this tension of women's visibility in culture up in very different ways than Judy Chicago, for instance. While Chicago engages through the more classical critique of artwork – creating art that speaks to her point of view in hopes other will see and affirm it – the Guerrilla Girls take a different and more aggressive tact of publicly calling for women's equal inclusion in the social sphere.

Peggy Diggs, who installed a number of billboards asking “Does he hurt you?” says her work is intended to “cause conversations, urge new thinking, or encourage a slight alteration in the way something is seen” (Diggs quoted in Steward Heon, 1999, p. 33) by sparking dialogue in the public sector. Diggs writes, “although the artist's billboard appears in a space dedicated to advertising, it cannot be commodified: such a billboard makes its point — usually to an unintentional audience — and then is gone” (Diggs quoted in Steward Heon, 1999, p. 32).

Diggs' comments point out that the ephemeral medium of the billboard allows artists to capture new audiences, and to have their work seen by people regardless of prior interest in, or commitment to, either art or social justice. Diggs also highlights how art can be criticized as a tool for social change because it has quickly become a capitalist cultural commodity — an artifact of ‘cool.’ Echoing Guattari's (1995) interest in resignification and novel use of technologies, Diggs suggests that by *using* the tools of commodification culture, a new kind of art may emerge.

The tension of evanescence versus permanence is also an important one to hold when considering a history of culture jamming. Feminist artwork not only makes aesthetic room for culture jamming, it also provides and keeps a history that culture jamming, by its flashy and short lived nature, simply cannot. Works like Diggs' straddle the boundaries of classic art which remains in galleries, and culture jamming acts which disappear within days, by creating social justice themed billboard art which enjoys short runs in the street before being immortalized in photo books.

Erika Rothenberg uses billboards to create an experience for her viewers which is similar to traditional bait and switch of advertisements, though with a very different ending. Baiting the viewer with simple, wholesome imagery (a smiling family or boisterous, hugging teenagers) and an eager and placating 'hook' ("There are still homes in the U.S. that consist of a husband who works, a housewife, and 2 kids!" or "Teenagers don't die of AIDS"), Rothenberg then jars the viewer with a startling and oppositional punchline — revealing that only 4% of families fit the idyllic picture she has painted, or noting below the teenagers' grinning faces that AIDS is "usually a time bomb that goes off in your 20's" admonishing viewers to "USE A CONDOM" (Steward Heon, 1999). Rothenberg's attempt to get viewers to double take, or look again, by seizing public advertising space and using it to promote messages of social justice is quite similar to the work of culture jammers.

Ron English, one of the early pioneers in what would become culture jamming, led a guerrilla billboard campaign in the early 80s. Usually working illegally, English hijacked billboards with his own designed and produced anti-ads that looked almost exactly like typical commercial billboards, but were in fact strong social satire. English's billboards often focused on what he saw as the distance between media distortion and reality, particularly with hot button

issues such as smoking, or government propaganda.

Pairing the famous cigarette company logo “Forever Kool” along with a toe tagged for the morgue, or the iconic imagery of Joe Camel miniaturized and put in a diaper for “Camels Jrs.,” English’s billboards startle viewers by using imagery and media they are familiar with, while at the same time revealing hidden agendas and ideologies behind the products for consumption (Steward Heon, 1999). Again, we can see that English’s use of public space, cultural commentary, and attempt to break the viewer of normative ways of seeing are all features that precede and make way for culture jamming.

Lastly, Barbara Kruger has used billboards and other public spaces — buses, bus stops, garage doors, and many more — to both display her art as well as actively speak to certain social causes, particularly the advancement of women and protest of violence against women. Pairing pictures of stereotypically masculine men with a loud splash of text reading “HELP!” and explanation below, “We’ve finally sent the kids off to school. We’re not getting any younger. I’ve got high blood pressure and arthritis. I just found out I’m pregnant. What should I do?” Kruger playfully but powerfully demonstrates the responsibility and imperative for child bearing that women typically bear.

Again this kind of reframing, or *détournement* where the viewer encounters a seemingly familiar image that instead offers a surprise or a new angle is quite typical of culture jamming, and Kruger’s work paved the way for feminist creative activism. Other billboards by Kruger declare, “We don’t need another hero” emblazoned across the doughy face of a man eating a banana; or plaster, “Your body is a battleground” over a surprised woman’s eyes (Alberroa, Gever, Kwon, & Squiers, 2010).

“Your body is a battleground” typifies the political and activist current running through

much of Kruger's work. With a message themed around women's social justice, and a public medium, some iterations of Kruger's "Battleground" campaign were also directly tied to political events, such as a poster version Kruger created to advertise a rally in support of *Roe vs. Wade* for a crucial court decision. Thus Kruger's work not only gets out of the art space and into the public world, making it relevant and accessible to more people, but she also uses her art and her position as an artist to motivate people towards ideological ends. Art critic Miwon Kwon describes Kruger's work as a "double appropriation," writing:

"The world of commercial advertisements of slick and 'fast' graphics encouraging consumerism is crossbred with the vernacular culture of do-it-yourself cardboard signs made by the homeless or the needy that confess a personal predicament.... combining two different modes of public address, or two different worlds of public solicitation — one devoted to producing desire for the acquisition of more goods and the other pleading for a sympathetic response to a person's deprivation." (Alberroa, Gever, Kwon, & Squiers, 2010, p. 93)

Kruger's work provides perhaps the most apt bridge into the world of culture jamming, as her work employs public space, engages advocacy, and often ties together macro social issues with very personal experiences in both subject matter and viewing experience. Because Kruger's work appears in the public space, and speaks to political issues, audiences are called not only to think about the issues that she is presenting, but to do so with respect to their own lives.

While the work of these feminist artists provides a history for and useful entry point into the exploration of culture jamming, they unfortunately have been infrequently explored in this

way. Though these artists' works have been discussed and analyzed at length by critics, who often point out the implications for gender, psychology, and cultural change, none specifically link these works to culture jamming or the notion of creative activism as a cultural therapeutic.

Additionally, art — much like psychology — can be unfortunately exclusive as a field. Even when the works of artists are public, discussion of them still tends to take place firmly within the critical field and often remains there, without interdisciplinary exploration. This research aims to tie together insights from artists, culture jammers, educators, psychologists, and cultural critics to see what these fields bear in common and how we might enhance our mutual understandings of systemic suffering, as well as share strategies for change and transformation. The works of Chicago, Sherman, Holzer, Diggs, English, and Kruger, among others, provide a history within the art world for thinking culture jamming, as well as provide a place in which we might *keep* our history, and hold on to a permanent trace of aesthetic interventions through art.

### ***Culture jamming***

Unfortunately there is a paucity of literature regarding culture jamming and a brief review quickly reveals that culture jamming is an under-theorized phenomenon. What literature does exist on culture jamming tends to focus on how jamming constitutes a form of anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist media resistance and activism. Little has been written about culture jamming as a more general tool of social resistance, and even less on women's use of culture jamming as either producers or consumers. Further, there was nothing at all that I could find on culture jamming from a therapeutic perspective.

Though there may be mention of psychological implications, the current literature on

culture jamming approaches the topic from the fields of media studies or, occasionally, critical philosophy, but never psychology. Perhaps due to this slanted approach, what is written on culture jamming tends to be either a descriptive summary of its uses or some theoretical work connecting it to media resistance. In my review, however, I could not find any detailed accounts of the experiences of jammers themselves. Additionally, feminist culture jamming is typically — if mentioned at all — an afterthought rather than a focus of the current literature. Thus there is a need for a study of culture jamming that is not only descriptive but interpretive, that dialogues with clinical psychology, and that includes the recent feminist additions to the movement.

Anti-capitalist ideology is a thematic undercurrent that serves as a useful beginning point for understanding culture jamming. Certainly most of the current writing around culture jamming focuses on anti-capitalism and anti-consumerism as key concepts in the history and practice of culture jamming. Historically situating culture jamming as the beginnings of a rebellion against “corporatocracy,” many accounts stress the roots and progress of jamming as a social movement of economic and media based resistance, a means for personal and cultural empowerment, and an amplification of personal voice or volume. Though my research will shift the focus slightly from anti-capitalist practices, these roots are still quite obvious in feminist culture jamming, which draws upon the same concepts and strengths.

One of the first to write on the topic, Dery (1993) offers a useful and fairly comprehensive account of culture jamming’s official beginnings in the late 60’s with his pamphlet, *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Snipping in the Empire of Signs*. Dery traces culture jamming’s relationship to anti-consumerism and anti-capitalism as beginning with the protest of television and the cultural homogenization introduced through ever more immediate forms of media.

Dery goes on to illuminate and explore the many different forms that culture jamming

takes, including subvertising (the creation of fake ads much like Ron English's) guerrilla semiotics (inverting a common meaning in an ad, such as AdBuster's famous use of Calvin Klein's 'Obsession' perfume ad to draw attention to the obsession of eating disorders) billboard banditry (wherein jammers amend billboard messages, usually with spray paint), hacktivism (the use of hacking into websites and altering content to send a message) and more.

Drawing from Baudrillard's (1975) conception of hyperreality and simulacra, Dery understands media and capitalist culture as creating an encompassing dance of shadows: reflections, representations, and images meant to induce desire. In his exploration, Dery posits that culture jamming is a push back against the threat, real or imagined, that corporate voices might replace and drown out individual ones. He sets the terms of the jammer/media interaction as a question of *access* (what Foucault might deem "speaking rights"), asking: "who will have access to this cornucopia of information, and on what terms?" In so doing, Dery also highlights the role of the culture jammer in spreading democratic alternatives, and modeling resistance.

Also addressing culture jamming from the perspective of anti-capitalism, Kalle Lasn (1999) places culture jamming within a protracted history of artistic resistance to normative systems, beginning with the Situationists, who prized spontaneity and the new. A founder of Adbusters, one of the earliest culture jamming organizations, Lasn is particularly concerned with the way that "media spectacle slowly corrodes the human psyche" (p. 100) and points to how consumerist and media discourse constitutes a "form of mental slavery" (p. 104). Lasn is optimistic about culture jamming's ability to "devalue the spectacle" (p. 108) of media and describes culture jamming as one crucial arm of resistance — alongside boycotts, protests, and policy changes — which serves to gather a lot of attention and mobilize people.

Though the machinations of culture may seem huge, Lasn is unfazed, writing, "Something

is wrong; it can be fixed, but the fix requires seeing the situation in a *novel way*” (p. 131, italics added). The novel element that culture jamming adds, eclipsing protest in Lasn’s account, is jamming’s ability to hijack brand imagery and everyday space, capitalizing on the popularity companies have already worked so hard for. Lasn notes that the jammer siphons off the resources of corporations and redirects them towards justice, writing “they spend millions building their corporate cool, and you keep stealing their electricity” (p. 132). This notion of volume, or hijacking existing structures, is central to Lasn’s view of culture jamming’s efficacy, and will be an important insight to keep in mind.

In *No Logo*, Klein (2009) echoes Lasn’s view of the monolithic corporate structure and is critical of the “one-way dialogue” (p. 178) with the media in which citizens are held captive. Klein details the specifics of corporate and advertising culture, including how brands, branding, and globalization work together to create an ideological empire of consumerism that overpowers and subjugates individuals. Klein sees the jammer responding to a capitalist culture that seeks to commodify everything — including youth, education, and identity — by exposing this commodification to the waiting and wanting public, writing, “Something not far from the surface of the public psyche is delighted to see the icons of corporate power subverted and mocked” (p. 287).

Klein describes culture jammers as activists who protect the individual’s right to participate in and change discourse, even when individuals may lack the capital to purchase the speaking rights that corporations can. Though she is less optimistic than Lasn about culture jamming’s ability to ultimately change the social landscape, Klein depicts jamming as a kind of “semiotic Robin Hoodism” (p. 280), whose noble bandits steal volume from the rich to amplify the whimpers of the poor.



Klein also points out that “there is a connection between the ad fatigue expressed by the jammers and the fierce salvos against media sexism” expressed by feminists (p. 289), connecting jamming to the way feminists have historically protested depictions and representations of women in the media. Klien also (extremely briefly) touches upon feminist critiques of the beauty industry through jamming. Klien cites that through “adopting the voice of the promoter and hacking into the surface of the ad culture” (p. 290), some women have been empowered to fight back against media objectification, and feel less trapped by cultural expectations.

In his article, *Visual Culture Jam: Art, Pedagogy, and Creative Resistance*, Darts (2004) expands theoretical horizons for understanding culture jamming. Offering a sensitive understanding of the impact of visual culture on the daily lives of individuals, Darts contends that “everyday aesthetic experiences” are “significant sites where ideological struggles occur, often without our conscious knowing” (p. 315). Given the significance of the aesthetic field not only visually but ideologically as well, Darts argues that the visual field is an important one in which social justice advocates can intervene. Darts also points out that acting in a visually noticeable way is important to empowering young people and to connecting ideas of social change with actual experiences of possibility.

Working from the position of an art educator, Darts makes the case for erasing the divisions between critical theory, art, and culture jamming, positing that visual culture creates a text which may be pedagogically interpreted and resisted via classroom spaces. Darts asserts that critical theory, art, and jamming all similarly constitute creative resistances to oppressive cultural structures (particularly media). Defining resistance as “oppositional behavior that contests institutional power and dominant cultural norms” (Darts, 2004, p. 316), Darts supports a view of culture jamming as a tool for social change and a method of resistance to normative discourses.

Dialoguing with critical pedagogy and the “resistance theories” of the 1970’s in particular, Darts (2004) writes: “resistance must be re-envisaged as a generative site of consciousness-raising,” (p. 317) and posits that culture jamming may serve as such a site. The key to culture jamming’s empowering effect is that jammers create media, rather than passively consume it, and Darts posits that this media creation in a consumerist culture is a critical exercise towards liberation. Darts’ work offers a valuable offshoot towards a more theoretical understanding of culture jamming, as well as providing a useful starting point for viewing culture jamming as a more general form of cultural resistance.

Handelman (1999) also contributes to a more sophisticated theoretical understanding of culture jamming, tying jamming explicitly to critical theory and critical research in particular. Helpfully, Handelman argues that culture jamming constitutes a critical project insofar as it aims to:

“identify the contradictions and constraints to human freedom of the underlying, taken-for-granted social structures imposed by the capitalist ideology as it is articulated and perpetuated by the culture industry...engage members of society in an active process of self-reflection and transformation; ... [and] aid members to arrive at alternative social structures that will enhance human freedom and self-determination (enlightenment), also referred to as ‘praxis’” (p. 401)

Bringing activism, resistance, and the important linkage between theory and practice to the fore, Handelman’s work is important to understanding the role of critical theory in understanding culture jamming. Though Handelman rightly notes that accounts of culture jamming often

articulate quite modernist notions of power — positioning the corporation or ideology as monolithically evil and the jammer as an intervening force towards some unified good — this does not prevent culture jamming from also operationalizing and utilizing postmodernist notions about the fragmented self (particularly Gergen, 1991). Handelman also highlights how jammers take advantage of the “radical bite” (Hetrick and Lozada, 1994) afforded through praxis and capitalize upon the deterioration of boundaries between theory and action.

Handelman (1999) also pays particular attention to the role of the “culture industry” (p. 400) and how its detrimental effects are multiplied when critical intervention or even simple vocal critique does not occur. He describes how culture jamming can “actively engage participants to take steps towards the removal of the constraints imposed by the dominant ideology” (p. 400). Using the work of famous jammers at the Media Foundation, Handelman unfolds how jamming constitutes a critical practice whose ultimate goal is liberation and empowerment of individuals as well as of the culture itself. Culture jamming’s important critical features as distilled by Handelman – exposing underlying ideology, encouraging action, and providing access to alternative structures – are particularly important to note and keep in mind in the pages to come.

Harris (2004) introduces the relevance of culture jamming for feminism and young women in her important work, *All About the Girl*. Detailing how girls interact with visual and media culture, Harris outlines the negative consequences of media interaction for female identity, power, and sexuality. Returning somewhat to culture jamming’s anti-capitalist roots, Harris describes how capitalism commodifies women in particular and how the feminization of the labor market in turn produced a feminization of advertising. That is, as women began working, advertisers began creating marketing strategies and ploys aimed at seizing upon the new female dollar.

Problematically, however, Harris asserts that these new advertising tactics reify a new

“consumer citizen” of the adolescent girl, co-opting feminism into a branding style and marketing scheme. Rather than providing any real liberation, Harris posits that corporations have simply coopted feminism and notions of female strength to hawk their latest products. This pairing of feminist and capitalists ideals problematically causes girls to conflate actual social empowerment with the purported empowered offered through consumption, and renders feminism a tool for the marketing world. In line with Klein and Dery’s concerns for voice and speaking rights, Harris argues that culture jamming is one way to seize feminism back from becoming yet another commodity and preserve it as a form of resistance.

Culture jamming may yet serve to “interrogate the ways ‘liberation’ is sold to girls through the conflation of feminism and consumption” (Harris, 2004, p. 167). Critical of how capitalism offers women and girls a supposed route to power through consumption and material gain, Harris admires how culture jamming may be able to not only counter this message, but illuminate how false and illusory capitalist conceptions of power are.

Harris also points out how culture jamming is one among many practices for resistance and empowerment. When taken together with political change, community building, and education, culture jamming may be part of an important shift towards a “new girl citizen:” one “who does not merely consume commercial culture but is an active producer and critic in her community” (Harris 2004, p. 171). The active role that both Harris and Handelman cite as crucial to liberation – and that Harris believes is particularly important for girls – will again be important to bear in mind in the Results chapters.

Lastly, bringing perhaps the most immediate relevance to the project at hand, Harold (2004) gives a sensitive analysis of culture jamming that includes some linkages to critical philosophy, as well as to feminist ideology. Describing culture jamming as a kind of “pranking” or

“rhetorical protest” (p. 189), Harold aims to understand how culture jamming works ideologically. In particular, Harold cites the work of Foucault, and explores how jamming may be an effective way to radically alter discourse “less through negating and opposing dominant rhetorics than by playfully and provocatively folding existing cultural forms in on themselves” (Harold, 2004, p. 191).

Harold argues that we are moving away from the disciplinary society described by Foucault, however, and into a control based society, as described by Deleuze. She writes “because of this emerging shift from disciplinarity (which spotlights the political rhetoric of the nation-state) to control (which increasingly relies on the visual rhetoric of the market), the opportunities for political protest have shifted as well” (p. 194). In Harold’s estimation, culture jamming offers a new avenue for resistance by sabotaging and appropriating the visual media available in mainstream discourse.

By way of example, Harold offers, among others, the Barbie Liberation Organization, important early feminist jammers who purchased and swapped voice boxes on G.I. Joe and Barbie dolls, replacing them in perfect packaging on the store shelves. When children then pulled the voice string on their dolls they could hear Barbie, declaring in Joe’s gravelly tone, phrases like: “Vengeance is mine!” and, “Dead men tell no lies” while G.I. Joe would pertly announce, “Let’s plan our dream wedding!” or, “Math class is tough” (Harold, 2004). Harold’s short, but well theorized piece offers valuable philosophical insight into the practice of culture jamming, and provides one of the only pieces I could find that engages with notions of discourse and ideology, which this research aims to continue and extend.

Though these sketches of the literature are necessarily limited, it is my hope that they give an impression of the scholarship that already exists on the topic, as well as demonstrate why the

current project is needed. Though the literature reviewed here has, to greater or lesser extents, begun to gesture towards the new theoretical and feminist possibilities for culture jamming, this conception is as of yet incomplete. Further, there is no literature within the publishing boundaries of psychology proper pertaining to culture jamming whatsoever. Thus a need exists not only for more academic writing and exploration of culture jamming as a phenomenon, but for feminist and psychological exploration in particular. This dissertation contributes to this growing body of literature by adding such an understanding, as well as by offering new qualitative interview data.

## **Methodology and method**

### ***Introduction and epistemology***

#### ***A positivist problem***

This chapter begins by outlining epistemological and methodological concerns relevant to analyzing and probing the therapeutic potential of feminist culture jamming. For the present study, I used a deconstructive hermeneutic method inspired by the works of Silverman (1994) and Caputo (1987) and comprised of 11 different readings. The method was used to analyze six different interviews and a selection of blog posts, tweets, and comments found online in order to further illuminate, contextualize, and see what use can be made of feminist culture jamming.

Before presenting the specifics of the method, I would like to begin by briefly discussing how I am operationalizing terms like “results” and “research.” This section will delineate the theoretical stance I took towards the analysis and further elaborate the major goals of my project. After establishing an epistemological base from which to proceed, I will move to describing the procedural steps of data collection and analysis, as well as how these steps achieve or align with the previously outlined goals and theoretical orientation.

Firstly, what is meant by an epistemological stance? Slife and Williams (1995) succinctly define an epistemology as “the ideas underlying theories of learning,” particularly those concerned with the “nature, origins, and limits of knowledge” (p. 66). Historically, psychological research has modeled itself after the traditions of positivism and empiricism prevalent in the natural sciences (Winter, 2000). Though there are many distinct streams of positivist and empiricist

research, generally these forms of research view the sensorial world as the most reliable source of knowledge, affirm the scientific method, and operationally define valid knowledge as that which can be tested and evidenced in a factual, shared reality (Riger, 1992). Empiricism and positivism form the bedrock of the Western world's general attitude towards knowing, and thus pervade what is culturally seen as useful or valid ways of studying, knowing, and learning. We do not see empirical epistemology as one among many stances towards knowledge, but rather endorse it as *the only* stance towards knowledge, and in this way, “we do not *choose* empiricism because it is correct” (Slife and Williams, 1995, p. 71, emphasis original).

Conducting research from an empiricist or positivist epistemology *is* a choice, however, and one that many researchers make blindly, at the expense of considering other epistemologies and ways of knowing. Prizing empirical knowledge as the most true or correct is not a factual reality, but evidence of the efficacy of the discourse of positivism itself, which is of course a social construction subject to historical and temporal variance (Burr, 2003). Critics of positivist paradigms also highlight that a positivist/empirical stance rests on several implicit assumptions; namely, 1) that there is a consistent and factually based reality that can be accessed by all; and 2) that certain methods can access and represent this reality better than others by eliminating outside factors or ‘confounding variables’ (Sewart, 1979).

Empiricist claims have been vociferously contested in the past several decades, however, particularly as our access to the global world expands and marginalized voices gain previously unprecedented volume. These marginalized voices point out how their experiences have not been included in universal and accepted definitions of truth and how the ‘truth’ deduced through empirical research is actually a shared, culturally constructed knowledge. The result of these many critiques has been a radicalization of epistemological approaches in qualitative research across



many different methods — including hermeneutic methods, which will be the focus of this chapter. This project follows then in a new tradition of a deconstructive practices and hermeneutics which do not endorse singular or universal Truth – “something hidden by and stored up in a tradition which is groaning to deliver it to us” (Caputo, 1987, p. 189) – and instead embraces a turn towards new epistemologies.

Radical, emergent schools in the field of qualitative research – particularly the schools of postmodernism, critical theory, and social constructionism – center around a critical stance towards the idea of Truth, asserting that there are “no metaphysical absolutes; no fundamental and abstract truths, laws, principles, or causes that exist or operate independent of human beings themselves” (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 54). Taking the impact of discourse seriously, postmodern researchers argue that even if there were essential truths lying out in the world, it would be impossible for us as human beings to somehow accurately represent them outside of our own interpretations and stances towards them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus these researchers not only take issue with the existence of fundamental truths, but also with the assertion that the goal of research should be to ferret out and then accurately represent such fundamental truths. To briefly summarize the cogent arguments of many postmodern researchers: the goal of representation does not account for the many forms that truth may take, the perspectival distance that exists between researcher and researched, or the vital importance of questions of identity and context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Riger, 1992; Maxwell, 1996, Schwandt, 1997).

Criticism of representation have been endorsed by many in qualitative research, who move from “results” to “interpretations” and “objectivity” to “reflexivity” in attempts to own the incomplete and fractured nature of truth. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) call this move the “crisis of representation,” and credit feminist, critical, and postmodern thinkers with helping to dismantle

‘accurate representation’ as the goal of qualitative research. Without empiricist epistemology as a bedrock and accurate representation as a goal, however, researchers must reorient themselves. Other stances towards knowing must be explored and established and, in the absence of the roadmarkers of empiricism and the comfort of claims to truth, we must begin to venture new definitions of what constitutes legitimate and valid knowledge.

What contributions then can postmodern and critical researchers make to the ever growing body of psychological knowledge? For some, the inability to get at accuracy leads to silence, or studies so narrowly focused and self effacing about their ability to speak as to be virtually silent; but this need not be so. A lack of ultimate, truth-bound authority does not need to imply there is nothing else to say, or that knowledge produced outside this definition is irrelevant or valueless.

Rather, this project embraces a view of knowledge and knowledge production firmly *rooted* in the critiques and fractures introduced by postmodern and post-structural thinkers. This new view requires a revised understanding of truth. As opposed to the traditional view of truth as an *answer*, above and for all, postmodern researchers instead view truth as an *action*: a pursuit that moves away from the “oblivion, forgetfulness, [and] ignoring that which is most important” (Silverman, 1994, p. 36). While empirical research claims to get at the truth of a matter by extracting the subject from the lived world and turning it into an object of study, this very process is often a kind of forgetfulness, an ignoring of the importance of context and the fact that all of us live in a world which deeply affects us.

Embracing a postmodern, social constructionist epistemology, this research is less concerned with questions of absolute truth than with the creation of useful knowledges and novel means of engagement with texts and ideas. Slife and Williams (1995) point out that “so called objective views of the universe are themselves a *type* of bias, a type of interpretation” (p. 88, italics

original). That is, positivist and empirical epistemologies are discursive and social constructions which paint the world in a specific light – they are far from value free or objective in the way that we often believe. If all knowledge is a construction then, we might advocate not for attempting to find an elusive and illusory truth, but for seeking “the most basic knowledge available” (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 89). In this project I have attempted to move towards what I consider to be the most basic knowledge available about culture jamming by providing both a descriptive account of the situation, or scene of the phenomena, as well as a detailed analysis of how what was described may be politically useful or helpful to those suffering in the world.

An inspirational thinker in the creation of this method, Caputo is critical of those methodological schools, including some forms of hermeneutics itself, which would seek finalized, foreclosed meanings, answers, or truth in research. He points out that in thinking method, “the essential thing is the opening it creates, not the resolution” (Caputo, 1987, p. 5). It is my intention with this data, and this project, to do exactly as Caputo advises: to continue creating new questions and new points of entry and application of the knowledge that is produced here. By providing several data sources as well as several approaches towards the text, I hope to create an opening for psychologists, clinicians, activists, and culture jammers to begin exploring each other’s works and collaborating towards the generation of new ideas.

“Knowledge” here is understood as the product of interpretation, of relations among individuals, and of social and institutional discourse. In line with a postmodern epistemology, knowledge is not seen as an a priori set of concepts in the head, nor an experience contained in the sensory world, but an act of seeking, finding, questioning, interpreting and, importantly, reading. Reading in the postmodern sense constitutes an acknowledgment that:

“human behaviors reflect a broad, rich, changing, and open ended context, much as the plot of a novel reflects what has gone on earlier in the novel. Just as the plot of a novel can only be understood by reading the novel and making sense of the whole of it, human behavior can only be understood by ‘reading’ the broader context of life and history” (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 55).

It bears remarking that “reading” is understood in this project as an encounter with a text, not limited to the literary or to visual act of seeing and comprehending written words on a page. Rather, “reading” is used to denote a conversation with the text that I attempted to have, a moment between us wherein I attempted to move towards understanding what the text has to say, or can be made to say, in new and different ways. Similarly “text” here refers not only to works of the written word, or interview transcripts, but also to the sounds of the conversations, the images the jammers produced, and the grounding and context of the interviews themselves. All these elements – interview transcripts, interview situation, auditory experience of the conversation, images produced by jammers, written tweets and online feedback – have been included as texts for analysis in the pages to come.

This dissertation also follows a history of postmodern theory and research which seeks to “remove ways of knowing from the private mind entirely, placing them more within the sphere of social activity and discourse” (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 77). What I have ventured to find, and what I hope to present in the coming pages is not the truth about feminist culture jamming and its therapeutic value per se, but a conversation about those ideas, where they find footing (and where they don’t), and how they came to be. I am not attempting to discover the truth or the ‘actual value’ of feminist culture jamming as a cultural therapeutic, but rather to explore the notion that it *might*

be therapeutic for some people, in some contexts, and to promote these ideas for further conversation and debate. This approach is clearly a “mode of engagement with the world that differs qualitatively from the modes of engagement employed by the rationalist or empiricist” and sets aside the search for conclusive answers, choosing instead to focus on a “practical understanding” (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 83).

The fact that there is no one, sole truth to be found and put forth does not preclude the finding and sharing of valuable ideas, it only requires a more careful explication of one’s goals and theoretical stance towards knowledge. As Caputo (1987) points out, the fracturing of truth and seeking of alternatives introduced by postmodernism is “not an exercise in nihilism, which wants to reduce human practices and institutions to rubble, but an attempt to face up to the bad news that metaphysics has been keeping under cover, to the fact that Hermes [deliverer of divine messages] is also a well-known trickster and liar” (p. 6). That is, in as much as the truth reveals, it covers over; as much as it tells, it deceives; as much as it answers, it eludes.

### *Truth and validity*

Turning away from empiricism and the quest for ‘accurate’ and generalizable results, a postmodern epistemology might ask not if a piece of research is *true*, but if it is *valid*: done with integrity, offered with responsibility, and worthy of serious consideration. The crisis of representation and critique of empiricism begs us to acknowledge that asking “are these results true?” is both an impossible question and a fundamentally problematic premise from which to proceed. We should not, however, disregard asking questions, doing rigorous, thorough work, or making efforts to move, speak, and change the world with research simply because we disregard

problematic premise of empiricism.

Rather, research can maintain its unique character as a particular knowledge pursuit — different from the arts, journalism, or literature — by pursuing contextualized knowledges rather than ultimate Truth and measuring itself by validity rather than accuracy. Validity, I will argue, is a traditional research concept that can be re-purposed to guide us through the crisis of representation and serve as a lamppost for the postmodern researcher. As a set of practices, validity can be tailored and individualized to the different goals, methods, and theoretical frameworks of different projects, while still offering a basis on which readers can evaluate research, as well as a platform for researchers to legitimize and explain their work. It is my hope that a move towards conceptualizing validity as a fit to goals (which I will detail presently) allows for necessary academic processes of comparison and justification while also refusing to appeal to a sense of abstract truth or accurate reality for such justification. In this way my methodological approach:

“consists in conserving all those old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth value attributed to them; there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful. In the meantime their relative efficacy is exploited and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces” (Derrida, 1980, p. 284)

Thus my method still has steps, and I have still taken care to collect data, and to approach it from a number of angles in order to devise something useful, interesting, or provocative to say. Yet the purpose of these actions — which may seem superficially similar to the old lock-step methods

of traditional positivist science — differs radically from the intentions and motivations of such research. That is, my method is not a tool that will carry me to the truth, which I will then attempt to accurately represent, but a set of actions intended to help me see the text in new ways and propose some valid suggestions and ideas.

While this shift may seem subtle or superficial, it is one I believe is of crucial importance. Reading the texts multiple times and in multiple ways was not designed with an idea that such diversity moves me closer to the ‘real story’ of culture jamming — the “uninterpreted city waiting to be interpreted” (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 88) — but rather constitutes an acknowledgment that “no one interpretation exhausts the context” of the phenomenon (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 89) and that any text is always already home to many different “epochs” (Derrida, 1977). This move away from assessing truth and towards assessing validity requires some unpacking of the term.

Validity is a concept that is already well in circulation, but historically the term has been understood as little more than the handmaiden of truth — how can we tell the research is really *true*, and not just whatever the researcher thinks or wanted to find? Critiques to traditional research paradigms and assumptions about truth have brought with them critiques of traditional definitions of validity, and inspired new methods for assessing and tracking validity in qualitative and postmodern research.

However, without an explicit goal of the research (truth-telling or otherwise), validity is a difficult concept to fix. Burr (2003) points out that “although most researchers do seem to recognise the need to legitimate their analysis in some ways” there are currently “no criteria that are universally applied” (p. 158) when it comes to validating postmodern and social constructionist pieces of research, or assessing their value. Further, some new techniques for validating qualitative work still seem to point at the goal of truth telling or accurate representation.

Validation techniques like member-checking – wherein the researcher presents findings to the participants to check and collaborate on – are widely used and yet rife with conflict (Angen, 2000).

What is it exactly that is being “checked,” if not accuracy of representation or interpretation?

A similar epistemological problem occurs with triangulation — another common form of validation – where the researcher cross examines findings by using multiple modes of gathering data, multiple researchers to check the data, or multiple theoretical frameworks. As with triangulation, however, the quest that drives these actions is usually for agreement: if multiple methods, theories, or people find the same thing to be the case, it must be true and the research is therefore a valid and acceptable work. Again it becomes plain that this conceptualization risks theoretical confusion by continuing to rely on the assumption of a singular truth — one that is accessible from multiple angles — even while being embedded within a new tradition that claims to reject the concept of singular truth (Babour, 1998).

Other forms of validity attempt to move away from agreement, setting up different criteria for validity. One such conception, resonance validity, argues that the work is valid if it makes sense with the reader and resonates with her own experience (Stiles, 1993). This is fine for some pieces of work, but other authors argue that this captures only if the work is moving or perhaps, personally applicable, but not if the work is actually helpful or useful to the rest of the world. Proponents of resonance validity point out that resonance is how other works, like poetry, are judged to be valid, and critics use the same point as a complaint against resonance validity: research is not poetry (Chalquist & Rankin, 2008).

Authors of a political mindset may be more likely to take up an idea like catalytic validity, wherein the research is considered valid if it causes liberation and transformation in the participants and the community at large (Reason & Rowan, 1981). This is a valuable idea, but



often one that is difficult to measure and comes under criticism for not honoring the value found in simply opening up a new perspective, or attempting to illustrate how a certain form of life exists, without wanting to necessarily change it (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

What often seems to be at stake is not whether one form of validating a work is baseless and useless or not, but rather a charge that *any* given conceptualization of validity is problematic to someone else's conception of what the goal of qualitative research ought to be. Rather than continue to squabble over who can come up with the best form of validity, and why and when others don't work, this particular project argues for validation as an assessment of *fit to goals*.

Understanding we cannot appeal to a single universal truth, nor even to a pre-formulated new universal notion of what it means to be valid in the postmodern field, it is nevertheless necessary to have some manner of assessing what a piece of research offers and a framework for contextualizing and evaluating its findings. It therefore seems appropriate to define a work as valid — done with rigor, offered with responsibility, and worthy of consideration — if it in fact does the work it claims to do and achieves the goals it sets out to achieve.

If we choose to eschew a one size fits all method for assessing research, we make room for different aims, different truths, and different perspectives. However, if we do choose this move, it becomes imperative for researchers to be transparent in clearly stating what the goals are for their projects, so that the community may have some way to measure the project. The value of the project can then be assessed based not on whether or not it corresponds to an objective truth, but whether or not it corresponds to what the researcher claims to have done.

The method then becomes less an object of scientific fetishization — the holy grail that will complete the quest for truth, if only done with the utmost care — and more of a specific means and set of practices for accomplishing the outlined goals. This understanding of validity also falls

neatly in line with Derrida's conception of *bricolage*; that is, it represents a kind of "borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined" (Derrida, 1980, p. 284). The degradation of empirical science as the one and only route to knowledge does not mean its tools, vocabulary, or practices are purposeless, merely that they must be re-purposed, re-envisioned, and always held loosely.

This project does not then aspire to accessing, telling, or trademarking the truth. However, it does aspire to other goals and it is my hope that the value and lasting impact of this research be judged through an accounting of how I have risen to meet them. These goals include:

- 1) To gain more description and information about the phenomenon of feminist culture jamming from a number of different entry points and perspectives;
- 2) To expose the work of feminist culture jammers to a larger audience and promote their work as socially, culturally, and clinically valuable;
- 3) To put individuals and ideas from the worlds of academia, art, and community activism in conversation with each other where conversation has previously been limited; and,
- 4) To hear how culture jammers and other witnesses of culture jamming respond to my particular ideas about cultural sickness and culture jamming as a cultural therapeutic.

My method then aims not to discover the real truth about culture jamming, nor to represent the participants' experiences with the most accuracy as possible, nor even to answer the question of whether or not culture jamming is therapeutic, but to be faithful to these outlined goals. The steps I have devised and taken to analyze the data have been conducted with these goals in mind, and are designed to achieve them, as well as to allow the reader to see clearly at each step

how I am moving towards them.

When I designed my method, I carefully reflected on these goals throughout the process and eliminated any steps or actions that seemed superfluous to them. If an action really seemed crucial, I considered revising my goals. As I outline the analytical steps taken in the following sections, I will highlight how and in what way each step was done to speak to or further one of these goals.

### ***Procedures and method of analysis***

#### *Participant recruitment, data collection, and interview procedures*

For the present study I recruited six participants, using several different methods of recruitment. Four of the participants (Hannah Brancato, Rebecca Nagle, Lillian Hsu, and Caitlin Boyle) were found by using the Internet to locate and link them to their publicly available works of feminist culture jamming. Due to the anonymous nature of much of culture jamming, connecting specific authors to discrete acts can prove quite challenging.

Given this challenge, three participants (Hannah, Rebecca, and Lillian) were emailed during the proposal stages of this project (March, 2013) to assess if there would even be a large enough pool of accessible participants to move forward. Participants were consequently selected based on the ability to link them to their work, and a willingness to conduct an interview with me. The participants were individually emailed a brief description of the research and asked if they would be interested in participating in a one to two hour interview regarding their culture jamming work and my related questions.

After the initial three participants confirmed interest and willingness to participate, documents were submitted to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Duquesne University to gain ethical approval for participant interaction. IRB approval was obtained in October (2013), following which all three participants were emailed again to re-confirm willingness to participate. Copies of all official documentation, including IRB approval and consent forms can be found in Appendix A.

During this time, the work of Caitlin Boyle, founder of Operation Beautiful, came to my attention and I subsequently emailed her a description of the research project and asked if she would be willing to participate. The final two participants, Meghana Kulkarni and Sophie Hess, were located through Hannah and Rebecca, who had worked with them on the Playboy jam featured here. Hannah provided me with Meghana and Sophie's email addresses, after which I followed the same protocol of emailing a description and confirming willingness to participate in a one to two hour interview.

After recruitment, each participant was individually sent a consent form outlining the scope, benefits, and any potential risks of the research interview. Because all participants live out of state, participants were asked to digitally "sign" the document by typing their name. Particularly because I did not intend to protect the participants' identities (for reasons that will be outlined presently) participants were asked again if they had any questions and consent was confirmed again orally before beginning the interview.

Interviews were conducted either via video chat or telephone, depending on the participant's preference. Interviews with Rebecca, Lillian, Meghana, and Caitlin took place over the phone (the interview with Meghana began over video chat but needed to move to phone due to technical difficulties), and interviews with Hannah and Sophie took place over Skype video chat.

Due to software difficulties, video recording proved only possible and effective with Sophie, and audio recordings were obtained for all other participants (video recording software failed during my interview with Hannah, producing only an audio recording). These recordings were then transcribed to produce a text for analysis.

Though non-traditional, I opted — with their consent — to use the participants' real names and not anonymize them in the writing of this research. Since most of the participants were able to be connected to their work using the Internet in the first place, anonymizing them would be both pointless and potentially confusing to future readers, who could easily look up the projects and determine the participants' real identities. Additionally, given that their works are publicly available, it was assumed that participants already have at least some comfort disclosing levels of their experiences publicly.

Secondly, the traditional reason to anonymize participants — so as to free them to speak frankly about aspects of their experience that may be shameful or that they would not want connected to their personal identities — seemed less important since the jammers' intimate experience was not the sole or even primary point of the interview. Though I asked the participants personal questions about their feelings and experiences, this was in relation to their work, and all participants were made aware that they could choose not to answer any questions that were too personal. Thus it was my judgment that the information that participants might offer would not be sensitive enough so as to be greatly benefited by a pseudonym, and that the resultant risk of confusion was greater than any particular benefit.

Lastly, I considered my goals when making this methodological choice. In particular, I felt that promoting feminist culture jamming, and these works in particular (goal #2), would be more possible if I kept the jammers' identities intact and available to readers. Also in line with my stated

goals, I felt it would be easier to help foster connections and conversations between the jammers and each other, as well as the academic world (goal #3), if their identities were known.

Nevertheless, given that this is a somewhat unusual move in research interviews, I made sure to highlight it for my participants and confirm prior to the interview that they understood that they would be connected by their names to any information they gave me.

### *Description of method*

#### *Deconstructive hermeneutics: A method of moments*

After careful reflection upon the theoretical grounding, goals, and limitations of the project at hand, I designed a method for analysis that I believe pays respect to my theoretical framework while also allowing useful and vital access to the texts. This method was inspired by the radical hermeneutics of John Caputo (1987) and Hugh Silverman (1994) and the deconstructive project of Jacques Derrida (1977, 1985). The analysis consisted of 11 separate readings, divided into three different methodological moments. These moments mimic or embody different moments within hermeneutic evolution, beginning with a descriptive interrogation, moving to an open interpretation, and concluding with a deconstructive reading.

Each reading, and each moment, serves to provoke the text/data into further conversation and to thus be constantly engaged in a “creative re-reading... a repetition that produces something new” (Caputo, 1987, p. 5). These moments have also been designed to help me move towards some of the textualities present in the interviews — the “various meaning structures in a text” which enable certain possibilities and conceptual spaces to be marked out (Silverman, 1994, p. 2).

Each of the six interviews was individually subjected to each of the 11 readings (in three moments) that I will describe presently. Transcripts and summaries from the first set of readings can be accessed in the appendices.

As I outlined in the previous sections, my desire in collecting these interviews and subjecting them to analysis was to converse and produce discussions from the texts that are meaningfully valid; to create “praxical” knowledges and “to ask about rather than conclude for” (Silverman, 1994, p. 31). If I move to interrogate the phenomenon of feminist culture jamming — by conducting interviews and by analyzing them — it is not to produce conclusive answers or generalizable truths, but so that “something can be seen, something can be said, something can be known, something can be understood, something *can be interrogated*” (Silverman, 1994, p. 35, italics added). I will now describe the general tone or theme of each of the methodological moments and the specific reading practices each contained.

#### *First readings: A moment of description*

In beginning to analyze my interviews, the first moment, or set of readings, consisted of an attempt to naively provoke the text to reveal itself, or to simply see it “as it is.” Bracketing for a moment the impossibility of such a move — given my stance as interpreter and the inherent meaning that I bestow upon any text by the very act of reading it — this set of readings was intended to help obtain and present a basic description of what feminist culture jamming is and looks like. Following the classic hermeneutics of Hegel and to some extent the early Heidegger (Silverman, 1994), these readings presumed a meaning that *is* present in the text, as well as an ability of the researcher to access or hear it by using the right means, in particular, the hermeneutic

cycle of reading, interpreting, and re-reading.

Using the metaphor of Hermes, messenger to the gods, Caputo (1987) identifies this style of hermeneutic reading as a kind of “delivery service” which serves to “insure an accurate and faithful delivery of messages, like a good metaphysical postmaster” (p. 5). This “philosophy of retrieval” (Caputo, 1987, p. 95) is obviously limited — limits which will be addressed in the steps to come — but aims to “fuse the horizons [of meaning] so as to bear fruit in the present” (Caputo, 1987, p. 96). Thus these readings were a first go, an attempt to get the story straight, as I read the texts as naively as possible for what sense I could make of them.

This first cluster, the moment of description, contained four separate readings. In addition to providing a general narrative, these first readings were also designed to serve my goal of further exposing the phenomenon of feminist culture jamming. In the first reading of this set I simply took each transcript individually and read the text through carefully, dwelling with my impressions of ‘what is going on here?’, taking notes, and rephrasing the document throughout, in my own words.

In this reading I attempted to get at what was taking place in the conversation between the participant and I: what information is being transmitted and what kind of encounter is happening? This reading was “not about supplying anticipatory horizons but about *listening to what is sent our way*” (Caputo, 1987, p. 103, italics added). After reading the transcript again, I compiled my re-phrasings along with the participant transcripts and wrote a Descriptive Summary for each interview (accessible in Appendix D), which was an attempt to offer a condensed and reiterated version of what I heard in each participant’s message.

In the second reading, I listened to each of the recordings (and in the case of Sophie, watched the recording) again, taking notes as I went on what I was *hearing* and what situation was being relationally constituted between the participant and I. Again, attempting to ask the naive



question “what is the story here?” or “what is taking place in this conversation?” the audio reading was especially designed to help me pay attention to those components that may have been leveled in the transcription: pauses, breaths, excited tonality, soft disappointment, interruptions, background noise, finishing each other’s sentences and so forth. Generally speaking, this reading was designed to give me another vantage point to see the story of the interview, namely the relationship established between the interviewee and I, and the tone of our interaction, literally and metaphorically, as heard rather than simply seen.

For the third reading, I excerpted just the participant’s responses from the total transcript, pasting them together to form a new transcript of only her words (erasing my questions, reflective comments, or responses). This new transcript then formed a false monologue — a perspective of only the participant with me hidden from view (as has been the case in much traditional, empirical research). This transcript was then read again carefully, attempting to see the story of the participant in her own words, not as a reaction to or interaction with me, but as clean and acontextual thoughts and words of her own about the subject matter. I tried in this reading to get at how the participant is attempting to position herself, what she endorses and what she shies from, and how she interacted with me and described her life and work.

Lastly, for the fourth reading in this moment I reversed the process done in the third and excerpted only *my* questions, responses, and comments from the transcripts, pasting these together to form a new transcript. This new transcript again presents a false situation — purely me as a researcher, presenting my own ideas, projects, and connections without respect to any concrete individual or event. In so doing, I am attempting to acknowledge, in the very structure of the method, that both the researcher and the researched are important parts of the story of what is going on. This new transcript was then read as its own text, paying attention to and highlighting

how I was (am) attempting to present myself, my ideas, and my positionality.

Following the second, third, and fourth readings, I compiled a short bulleted list for each interview, attempting to capture how an outside listener and reader might describe both the participant and I if all they had was the information contained in the transcript and the experience of listening to the interview. These Dynamic Summaries can be accessed in Appendix E. Results of all four of these readings in the first moment are presented in the first Results chapter.

### *Second readings: A moment of interpretation*

For the second set of readings, the naivety of the first set of readings is acknowledged and responded to with a cluster of explicitly interpretive readings. That is, in these readings I acknowledge that I *do* have more information about myself and the participants than is simply contained in the transcript — in *any* of the transcripts. In this moment I respect the criticisms of contemporary hermeneuticians who admonish “[k]nowledge can no longer be produced as if it were a ball shot from a cannon. Rather, as hermeneutics comes to show, knowledge is more like placing the activity of the knowing self in the track of the trajectory” (Silverman, 1994, p. 33). Taking seriously these criticisms I devised a second set of readings to attempt to own the inherent practice of interpretation that occurs with any reading or encounter with a text and make transparent the fact that this was not an acontextual conversation, but a specific one, in a specific context.

If the first readings constitute a straightforward attempt to carry the message of the text outward from whence it came, the second set of readings acknowledges “an intertwining of message and messenger, of the call issuing from the god... and the being who, like Hermes, is used

to bear that message” (Caputo, 1987, p. 107). Though this intertwining imperils the text in many ways, covering over its possible slips and radical alterity, it is also interpretation which is “the activity of understanding that provides meaning,” (Silverman, 1994, p. 34) that is, interpretation gives knowledge grounding, context, and usefulness.

Having gained some sense of the story “as it is,” the second set of readings correct for the presumed (but historically heavily criticized) transparency and innocence of the first set of readings and provide a fuller picture of the situation of the text. That is, these are interviews in the context of a research project (one that I devised) and there are certain ideas and concepts I am interested in. I did not allow my participants to simply speak about anything they wanted, but asked them particular questions, and had particular notions in mind. Here I set aside the hermeneutic model of the first readings “which waits for the mail to be delivered, for the meaning of Being to be sent one’s way” (Caputo, 1987, p. 104) and more fully acknowledged my own carrying of the message, and the prints I therefore leave on the envelope. This moment, the moment of interpretation, consisted of four separate readings.

For the first reading in this set, I focused on any material in the transcript that had anything to do with the concept of sickness or suffering, one of my key concepts. Questions or comments I made, as well as responses from participants that explicitly spoke to or drew upon ideas of illness, diagnosis, or simply suffering (pain, anger, despair, hopelessness) were highlighted, dwelt with, and subjected to more copious note taking. Though it was my original intention to copy and paste these verbal interactions into a new transcript and read it separately, I found the disjointed structure that produced too jarring.

Deciding that I wanted to read these comments within the fuller context of the transcript, I instead chose to carefully re-read each one of the initial transcripts and just focus on the parts that

pertained to the concept in question, taking notes and excerpting relevant quotes into a separate document than then informed my writing. For the second, third, and fourth readings in the set, this process of selectively attending to certain concepts and questions was repeated with different foci: feminism, general characteristics of healing, and culture jamming and other cultural therapeutics.

By attending to these important themes carefully, I own my role as researcher and interpreter, as well as hopefully gain further insight into the questions that are most relevant to me. I also recognize that “like moral knowledge, hermeneutic judgment takes on meaning only in the concrete situation, outside of which it is just a more or less empty schema” (Caputo, 1987, p. 110) and wish to move my understandings out of the abstract or merely descriptive realm and into a realm of practical understanding and social use. These readings serve my second and fourth goals of creating new conversations and connections between academia, art, and activism, as well as specifically learning more about how feminist culture jamming may be effective as a cultural therapeutic.

### *Third readings: A moment of deconstruction*

As the second set of readings built upon and corrected for criticisms of the first, so does the third and final set of readings stem from and answer the previous two. The final methodological moment, the moment of deconstruction, acknowledges the limits of both naive representation as well as sometimes myopic interpretation and looks for what is absent, falling through the cracks, or different in the texts. Silverman (1994) writes that “interpretation seeks to disclose what is hidden” and in this way “interpretation makes truth happen.” Yet the opposite question then waits, begging in the shadows: “is this also how lies happen?” (p. 36).

Having established and settled some meanings, this group of readings attempted to unsettle them, to *play* with them in the Derridean sense: to look for a “disruption of presence” within and between the texts (Derrida, 1980, p. 292). This kind of play “is always the play of absence and presence” (Derrida, 1980, p. 292) and this moment served to keep me attending to both these important poles in the text and keep me from settling into a place of certainty which would threaten the alterity of the text.

Following from Derrida’s (1980) charge that “the play of meaning can overflow signification” (p. 12) I must be willing to allow the text, and the meanings therein, to overflow or move beyond how I have attempted to capture them, fix them, or signify them, arresting their play. The first two sets of reading might be said to constitute an interrogation of the texts, an “asking about what it is” (Silverman, 1994, p. 40). Silverman writes, “Interrogation places itself between the asking and what is asked about. Interrogation makes it possible for what is asked about to speak. Interrogation places in question what is asked about so that it can speak for itself, so it can announce itself, so that it can make itself known” (p. 40).

Having learned and described and interpreted through a thorough interrogation, the third moment moves to a deconstruction which “involves an examination of the limits and supplements to the written statement” (Silverman, 1994, p. 40). Silverman (1994) proved a particularly useful guide in elucidating marking out a deconstructive path for this third and final moment, writing:

“Interrogation is concerned with visible things and their significations. Deconstruction is concerned with texts and their inscribed interrelations. Interrogation requires what is interrogated be put in question. Deconstruction requires that the text be examined for its differences (from other texts) and its deferrals (into other texts). Interrogation explores the

visible as intertwined with the invisible. Deconstruction examines textual traces, marks, traits, signatures, and differences as they occur in writing” (Silverman, 1994, p. 44).

Bearing in mind that deconstruction, that famously elusive concept of Derrida’s, is “neither an analysis nor a critique.... [it] is not even an act or an operation” (Derrida, 1985, p. 273), I nevertheless wish to call this phase of the method a deconstructive moment. In one sense, the deconstructive attitude is meant to be woven throughout the methodological process, in the going back and forth, entering and exiting, comparing, cutting, and re-crafting process of the data collection, as well as in the bricolaged nature of the first two sets of readings. This continual weaving, as well as the looseness with which I held the steps — being willing to amend or tweak the process as it made sense to me — aligns with Derrida’s notion that “[d]econstruction *takes place*, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity” indeed, it is one that “takes place everywhere” (Derrida, 1985, p. 274-275, italics added).

This moment employs deconstruction not as an action upon the text necessarily, but as a reading paradoxically possible only because the text is, always already, itself deconstructing: falling apart, coming undone. These readings then aimed to evoke a “‘facing up’ to the limits of our situation, to the illusions of which we are capable, to the original difficulty of our lives” (Caputo, 1987, p. 97) and focus in on those seams or loose joints already within the text.

As with the interpretive moment, this moment contained three separate readings, each designed to help accomplish my first and third goals of gaining more description into the phenomenon of feminist culture jamming and creating new connections and conversations. For the first reading in this set, I read each of the interviews against each other, looking for what

discrepancies arose from the texts. What does one participant say that none of the others even mention? Or what do all of them say... except for one or two? Where do they disagree with each other, or even with themselves, and what ideas find footing in some of the texts but not in others?

Understanding that “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique,” (Derrida, 1980, p. 284) this reading attempted to see how the accounts of my participants unsettle each other or render holes and gaps visible amongst them. Thinking ahead, I tried to incorporate this step (to the extent possible) in the process of data collection itself: checking out certain ideas of earlier participants with later ones during the interview process. Each transcript was again read through carefully and important differences or absences that stood out were highlighted or marginally noted.

The second reading in this set compared the interviews I collected with online response data that I found for the particular jams featured. This data consisted of testimonials, tweets, blog posts, and Facebook comments from people who were responding to one of the four jams conducted by the jammers I interviewed. For this reading, I compared the words of these witnesses regarding how they felt about or conceptualized the jam against how my participants described their actions, the intended effect, or the responses they hoped for, or believed they got. Here I recognize and acknowledge that the previous two sets of reading are too smooth, too straight, and turn my attention to looking for “ruptures within the tradition, its vulnerability to difference, its capacity to oppress” (Caputo, 1987, p. 112). How do these new participants interrupt or disrupt the ‘findings’ of the interviews?

The third and final readings consisted of reading each of the interview texts against my own assumptions, thoughts, and preconceptions about the research topic and the particular jams. Using the first set of readings — my impressions of what the story was — as well as reflections on

my preconceived notions before the research, I looked for the ways in which the jammers' accounts departed from where I wanted them to go, or thought they would or should go. I attempted to pay particular attention to our moments of disagreement within the interview, as well as times where there may not have been an overt negation or disagreement, but the accounts seem to differ, or subtly vary.

Reading for disagreement in the interviews themselves and comparing space between my own writing and the resultant interviews, I sought to glimpse places where my own assumptions and tentative results could be shifted, or more diverse than I initially thought. Impressions from the second and third moments are reviewed in the second and third Results chapters, and the differences I highlighted through these final readings are noted throughout.

After finishing each of the 11 readings for each of the six transcripts, I reviewed my notes, new transcripts, and descriptions, and designed the next three chapters to present my findings. Understanding that any synthesis moves away from individual differences, many of which are valuable (and thus highlighted in the third moment), the second goal of this research — to expose and promote the work of culture jamming as valuable — is best served by translating these comprehensive accounts into shorter, more general formats that can then be put to use in conversation with others. The next chapter will unpack the general summaries of the first moment, while the latter two move towards greater degrees of interpretation and application as informed by the second and third moments.



## **Part II: Research contributions and discussion**

### **Results 1: Scaffolding: A descriptive structure of support**

Though it is tempting to leap to the applications and practical uses for all of this research, it is necessary to first establish a scaffolding, or a structure from which to leap. I have chosen scaffolding as the title of this chapter in order to represent the manner in which I hope these results will be taken up: as a sturdy and grounded support from which the reader can see the situation of the interview as I saw it. This description is not the interview, or the situation itself, but rather a structure built atop it that I have constructed so that we may establish a common perspective. This chapter attempts to provide a basic description of the jams and summary of the general stories provided to me by my participants, as well as provide a moment of description and establish a scaffolded structure from which the interpretations and suggestions in the following chapters will stem.

As emphasized in the Method chapter, it should not be mistaken that this description provides a glimpse into the truth about, or fundamental structure of, culture jamming as such. Rather, the descriptive scaffolding here is, as all scaffolds are, human made. Nevertheless, I have attempted within this chapter to convey the stories told to me by my participants as holistically as possible, understanding that all description necessarily moves away from the phenomenon itself.

As outlined in the previous chapter, this moment of description will also hopefully function as a check towards validity, helping readers to see how I reached the conclusions I did, where they find footing in the data, and where my own extrapolations are occurring. This chapter will also introduce readers more completely to my participants and their work, provide an overview of participant responses, and acknowledge the reality of the research interview situation with all its

bumps and limitations. As such this chapter is organized into two sections, including both *how* I heard (process of the interview) and *what* I heard (content of the interviews). Though the transcripts and notes have been necessarily condensed in order to provide a general summary, individual differences are noted throughout and explored more particularly in the chapters to come.

It bears remarking that this chapter does *not* attempt to provide a holistic overview of the participant accounts. While this chapter provides a foothold for how the participants responded to my questions about advocacy, sexism, feminism, culture jamming, and healing, the following chapter will provide a much more detailed unpacking of the specifics of these concepts, as well as what I personally and as a researcher found most interesting and pertinent about their responses. All quotes are referenced by participant name and page number from the original transcript (i.e. SH7 indicates the quote is from Sophie Hess, page 7) and transcripts can be found in Appendix C.

### ***Who are these jammers?: Description of participants***

Before elaborating their stories as told to me, I'd like to introduce the participants who fueled this research and the actions they committed that caught my attention. Unless otherwise noted, all information was provided by the participants during the interviews. Relevant materials created by the participants (screencaps of websites, images of flyers, etc) can be found in Appendix B.

Rebecca Nagle is a 27 year old, queer, “mostly white” woman living in Baltimore, Maryland. She is currently employed as a coordinator for the No Boundaries Coalition, a community based grassroots organization working to unite Baltimore neighborhoods across the

lines of race, class, and gender. She serves, with Hannah Brancato, as one of the founders and co-directors of feminist activist collective FORCE. In addition to her work as a community activist, Rebecca is an artist who creates across media including video, installation, and performance art.

Hannah Brancato, co-founder and director of FORCE alongside Rebecca, is a 28 year old, white, heterosexual woman living in Baltimore, Maryland and currently employed as an adjunct instructor of arts at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Hannah is also an artist who works with a variety of materials, though she identifies predominantly with physical materials, particularly textiles and quilting.

I contacted both Hannah and Rebecca as part of my initial set of three participants after I became aware of their work through a jam they conducted called Pink Loves Consent. Pink Loves Consent was an online effort in which FORCE developed materials and used the logo and branding of Victoria's Secret — a popular women's underwear and lingerie company — to make it appear as though Victoria's Secret was unrolling a new line of consent themed underwear for women.

FORCE photographed models — of a diverse range of body shapes, weights, and races — in underwear with slogans like “Let's Talk About Sex” and “No Means No.” FORCE then created a Facebook page and website under the name Pink Loves Consent (a play off of Victoria's Secret's popular PINK line of underwear and lounge wear for young women and girls) to display the brand new ‘product.’ Timing the release of the jam to occur just before the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, FORCE aimed to overtake the social media coverage of the annual fashion show with a consent-themed message, rather than typical news coverage focusing on the thinness and attractiveness of the models.

The (still live) website — [www.pinklovesconsent.com](http://www.pinklovesconsent.com) — very effectively mimics the

visual and writing style of the actual Victoria's Secret website and includes pages such as a 'Love Consent' portion encouraging a "consent revolution" and featuring an explanation of consent and sexual communication. Additionally, pinklovesconsent.com has several other pages, including a "Then and Now" page comparing the new empowerment slogans with some 'former' (real) Victoria's Secret panties with words like "Sure Thing" and "Wink Wink" blazoned across them, and of course a 'sales' pages with the various underwear styles and new models (though no panties are actually available for sale).

Importantly, the jam also had ways for the audience to interact with it, including pages that seemed to invite audience interaction in the form of submitting logos for new styles or questions for a Q&A style sex advice column as well as *actually* active Twitter and Facebook accounts that helped broadcast the site and respond to those who were finding and responding to the jam. In addition to promoting themselves through social media, FORCE also created fake email accounts (pr@pinklovesconsent.com) from which they emailed 'press releases' about the new line of underwear to popular blog news sources like Jezebel.

The Pink Loves Consent jam effectively fooled thousands of people, receiving over 200,000 hits within three days. Though Victoria's Secret responded with legal force and tried to have the site shut down — and temporarily succeeded — FORCE's actions were protected under legal parody rights and follow up from the jam lasted for weeks, as FORCE encouraged fans to tweet to Victoria's Secret or post about why they loved consent using the hashtag (a tool for organizing online content) #LoveConsent. They also produced some actual versions of the Pink Loves Consent underwear and raffled them off to fans who used the #LoveConsent hashtag to tweet during the Victoria's Secret annual fashion show (*FORCE: Upsetting the Culture of Rape*, n.d).

Though I contacted Hannah and Rebecca initially to discuss the Pink Loves Consent jam,

in the time that elapsed between the initial contact and interview, FORCE had been busily at work with two new actions, both of which were discussed during the interviews with Hannah and Rebecca (which took place separately). One of their new actions, generally just referred to as the Playboy jam, consisted of FORCE co-opting the Playboy brand and, as with Pink Loves Consent, creating a fake website and affiliate social media pages pretending to be the Playboy corporation.

Timing with Playboy's annual "Top 10 Party Schools" list, FORCE made it appear as though this year Playboy was instead releasing a "Top 10 Consent Campuses" list, detailing which universities and colleges around the nation were the most progressive and active in working against sexual assault. The actual campuses and activities were all real and collected through student liaisons on those campuses with whom Hannah and Rebecca forged connections and solicited content from (like Sophie and Meghana).

The faux Playboy site — [www.partywithplayboy.com](http://www.partywithplayboy.com) — includes photos and snapshot descriptions of the top 10 campuses' activities as well as a faked interview with Hugh Hefner explaining the basics of consent and promoting feminism and sexual communication. For this jam, FORCE also produced fake news coverage for themselves, creating sites with 'close-enough' links to fool readers into believing that popular pop news sites such as The Huffington Post, BroBible, and Upworthy were covering Playboy's new change of heart.

After they were exposed, FORCE aimed to continue the conversation with an online Consent magazine, including a photographic "This is Consent" series, quiz on getting to know your campus consent environment, information about Title IX, and practical suggestions for raising awareness about sexual assault and promoting change in local environments (*FORCE: Upsetting the Culture of Rape*, n.d). In the magazine FORCE also advertised a Consent Revolution Awards competition wherein college students could submit photos and descriptions of how their

campuses promote consent for a chance to win a small prize pack (with condoms, t-shirts, and other consent themed merchandise from FORCE) and media exposure for their campus. The winners were later announced in an article from the Huffington Post, extending the conversation even further.

FORCE is also currently conducting a different and longer term project titled the Monument Quilt which aims to create a public healing space and monument to survivors of rape and sexual assault. The Monument Quilt allows survivors and allies to write their stories and messages of support on pieces of fabric that will be stitched together to read “NOT ALONE” and be displayed (temporarily) on the National Mall. With this temporary monument, they hope to provoke national conversation about the need for actual monuments and public acknowledgment of the suffering of survivors of sexual violence. As of the time of this writing, FORCE is still gathering squares from people all over the country — with instructions on their website about how to make a square or host a workshop for group creation — and currently raising funds to tour the quilt to 10 different cities, after an initial display in Baltimore.

As a part of the Monument Project, FORCE also crafted the phrase “I can’t forget what happened but no one else remembers” out of giant foam letters and floated it on the National Mall’s reflecting pool on Valentine’s Day, February 14th, 2013. Shortly after, on March 1st, they made a second display of some of the squares in front of the U.S. Capitol Building, the first time they were displayed in the nation’s capital (*Force: Upsetting the culture of rape*, n.d). All three of FORCE’s projects, including both jams and the Monument Quilt, were discussed during the interview and used in the resultant chapters as examples of creative activism.

Meghana Kulkarni is a 22 year old, heterosexual, bi-racial Indian American and Caucasian woman currently living in Ann Arbor, Michigan and attending the University of Michigan.

Meghana is a full time student majoring in Women Studies and minoring in Community Action and Social Change and she currently serves as a coordinator for the Men's Activism program through the Sexual Assault Prevention and Advocacy Center (SAPAC) on campus. I initially contacted Meghana as one of the student advocates involved with FORCE's Playboy jam, for which she submitted content about SAPAC and Men's Activism at University of Michigan.

While the Playboy jam was the initial contact point, the interview focused mainly around Meghana's work with the Men's Activism program through SAPAC. Specifically we talked about Meghana's work in terms of conducting workshops and programming for "communities that are not represented at SAPAC" (MK7), particularly men. Men's Activism includes activities such as giving talks to fraternities or Reserve Office Training Corps groups about what consent is and how men can be involved with sexual assault prevention, as well as specific campaigns such as No Shave November for Consent, which Meghana was involved with organizing.

Using the common theme of not shaving during November (first promoted by the American Cancer Society as a way to raise cancer awareness), Meghana coordinated with the Men's Activism program in organizing male students on University of Michigan's campus to sign a pledge, receive a t-shirt, and get on an email list for No Shave November for Consent. Participating male students then did not shave their facial hair for the month of November and wore their shirts sporting the words "Ask Me About My Beard." When anyone asked, they responded with the words of the pledge they had signed: "I believe that all sex should be consensual and come after an enthusiastic yes!"

No Shave November for Consent was intended to create spontaneous conversations about consent between men in casual settings where consent is rarely discussed, and was very successful in helping raise campus awareness and include men in local sexual assault advocacy. Since the

exposure generated by the Playboy jam, numerous other universities have now contacted SAPAC about how to host their own No Shave November for Consent activities.

Sophie Hess is a 21 year old white, queer<sup>2</sup> woman living in Oberlin, Ohio and attending Oberlin College where she is a full time student majoring in History and minoring in Art. Sophie is also employed as a News Director for Oberlin's radio station, a darkroom lab monitor in the photography department, and a building manager at the Student Union. I received Sophie's contact information through FORCE as one of the student advocates they collaborated with for the Playboy jam.

Sophie worked with Hannah and Rebecca to provide photos and content about Oberlin's sexual assault awareness activities on campus and was also a part of a "social media secret society" (SH7) team formed to promote the jam the day of its release and gain online exposure. Sophie also works with her campus Sexual Information Center, and, in November of 2013 helped organize Oberlin's annual Safer Sex week, during which she led workshops about consent and assisted with programming content.

Lillian Hsu is a 60 year old, heterosexual, Asian-American woman currently serving as the Director of Public Arts for the Cambridge Arts Council in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and residing in Salem, Massachusetts. She is also a multimedia artist and works with sculpture, textile, drawing, and installation art, as well as recently developing her writing portfolio. Lillian was one of the original three participants I contacted prior to beginning the research for her work with a project she designed and implemented called Beautiful Just The Way You Are (BJTWYA).

BJTWYA began in 2009 when Lillian designed and printed thousands of flyers which read in bold, large print and all capitalized text "Beautiful. Just the way you are" inside an orange frame

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<sup>2</sup> Sophie and my conversation involved a sophisticated level of discussion around issues of fluid gender and sexuality and Sophie notes that sexual identification is "tricky" for her



against a turquoise background. She took these flyers and used them to cover over any magazine for sale in a store “that uses the female body to sell something” (“Beautiful just the way you are”) or left them inside magazines for readers to find later. Text was later added to the back of the flyer which more clearly explained Lillian’s intentions in conducting the action, namely to “protest the relentless objectification of women and girls throughout our culture” (“Beautiful just the way you are”) by intervening at one such ubiquitous site of objectification — the magazine rack.

Lillian also added a website — [www.bytwya.com](http://www.bytwya.com) (now defunct) — with information and resources regarding media objectification and sexualization. Along with the text, Lillian listed the address on the flyers for finders to refer back to, creating a more connected web of respondents. She placed an initial run of 5,000 flyers in magazines around Massachusetts herself before adding the text and website, which allowed people to request copies of the flyers. After this Lillian printed another 10,000-15,000 flyers and began distributing them to others to take part in the action. As I described in the Introduction, this dissertation in part was inspired by a Beautiful Just The Way You Are flyer that *I* found while waiting in line at the grocery store.

Caitlin Boyle is a 29 year old, white, heterosexual female living in Charlotte, North Carolina. She is a motivational speaker and professional blogger, maintaining both a personal site and the active website of the project for which I interviewed her: Operation Beautiful. She is also the author of three books, two of which are focused on Operation Beautiful: one for adolescent girls and one for adult audiences. Caitlin began Operation Beautiful 2009 when she first stuck a post-it note on a public bathroom mirror that read “You are beautiful.”

Using her at the time already moderately successful and well read blog – The Healthy Tipping Point – Caitlin challenged her readers to write similarly affirming notes and leave them in public spaces for other women to find. The result was overwhelming, with Caitlin receiving over

75 notes within three days and having to launch a new and separate site for the project due to the high volume crashing her personal blog.

To date Caitlin has personally received photos of between 15,000 and 17,000 notes from women and girls on every continent, including Antarctica, and she estimates that this is just a fraction of the notes that have been actually posted (CB2). Since its beginning five years ago, Operation Beautiful has transformed into a movement, particularly amongst middle and high school aged girls and there are Operation Beautiful groups at schools across the country that focus on positive self talk and body image. Operation Beautiful has also been used as a group strategy at some outpatient eating disorder clinics and Caitlin continues to tour schools and Operation Beautiful groups to speak about media objectification, personal empowerment, and positive self imagery.

***Process: How did I hear?***

Having now given a brief introduction of who the participants are, I would like to be clear about the situation in which I met and spoke with them. As elaborated in the previous chapter, too often the temptation to erase context runs rampant throughout research, even qualitative research. Participants appear like ghosts out of the fog, their responses neatly detailed as though their thoughts simply transferred from their minds to mine, typed out on subsequent pages in a seamless osmosis of information.

Of course the reality is anything but. I am a person, as were all of my participants, who revealed to me during our interview not just their answers to my questions, or their thoughts about culture jamming and feminism, but pieces of themselves and fleeting glimpses into their lived

situations. In establishing a common ground between myself and readers of this research, I feel it is not only fair but ethical to include these relational, emotional, and situational elements as pieces of the puzzle. Though they do not necessarily inform the interpretations I drew from the interviews as heavily as the content, these relational impressions are nevertheless a very real dimension of the research, and deserve respect and inclusion; if for no other reason than their undeniable existence, and their historical exclusion from the research record.

Practically speaking, my interviews with the participants were a far cry from the controlled variables of quantitative research. Indeed, these interviews were at times highly imprecise, collaborative, flexible, and human. My participants are not simply data mines, but people living their lives, lives that shone through in the interviews: sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes endearingly. This section attempts to capture some of the practical, emotional, and relational elements of the interviews, primarily as informed by the second, third, and fourth readings within the first methodological moment. Though I had a set list of questions that I asked each of the participants (see Appendix A), I also let myself ask others questions as they arose and were of interest, and adjusted some items based on previous interviews.

As I reviewed the transcripts, a rough order of the interviews is apparent as I reference back (or don't) to what other participants have said, checking in with the current interviewee not just about the questions I have but about the other responses I've received. As elucidated in the previous chapter, this tagging back is not a concern in terms of tainting the perceived hygiene of the empirical interview, and in fact served my goal of creating connections between jammers and concepts. Aside from the questions, the actual conducting of the interview was rife with its own particular bumps and hiccups. Skype (video chat) proved an unreliable medium, with hang ups, call backs, and sound echoing in several of the interviews, which required that the participant and

I then work as a pair around these issues (sometimes calling back, sometimes switching to telephone).

Recording too was sometimes problematic: unfortunately the recording for Caitlin's interview was lost entirely due to a technical failure, which prompted subsequent interviews to be recorded on multiple devices. This shows up in the interviews, as I apologize and double check my multiple recorders, and after the fact, as some recordings were of better quality than others and different interviews produced video only (Sophie), audio only (Hannah, Rebecca, Lillian, Caitlin), or mixed recordings (Meghana).

I then also needed to find a way to work with or around the loss of information from the failed recording of Caitlin's interview, ultimately deciding to keep Caitlin as a participant because, although the recording was lost, I *did* have a nine page partial transcript as the result of my ongoing transcription during our interview. Here my personal work experience as a transcriptionist became not only a data savior but a significant consideration when taking together the context of this interview! Had I not been taking notes, or not been so skilled in transcription due to years on the job — both personal and situational elements — I likely would have had to scrap the interview entirely, illustrating the inevitable ties between situation, context, and data.

It is also important to bear in mind in the coming pages of elaboration and interpretation that Caitlin's record was particularly incomplete in comparison to the others, and thus more potentially vulnerable to holes or interpretive leaps. While I considered scheduling another conversation with Caitlin, this was deemed impractical and artificial, as we could not pretend we had never discussed these exact same topics before, nor could we somehow recreate the conversation that took place. Nevertheless I still gained valuable insight from my interaction with Caitlin, and the only step that truly could not be done was the listening (resulting in no Dynamic

Summary for her).

In addition to the practical elements of phone interviewing and recording, listening closely to and reading again through the transcripts reveals idiosyncratic quirks to each interaction, filling in with color and life both me as a researcher and these women as participants. A naive listener would note, for example, a cat meowing in the background of several interviews that I conducted in my home, a persistent cough, or the sound of my mug hitting the table as I sip tea during the conversation.

My participants too, are often interacting with the environments they are calling from — their offices, shared work spaces, homes, hotel rooms, or campus labs. They sometimes break off to greet someone walking by, take a bite of lunch, or make a side note to another person off screen. They look at their watches, gesture and hit the screen, burp, laugh, twirl a strand of hair, or search through old emails for a perfect quote to share with me. In short they exist, and their existence is a genuine part of our interview, for all of these practical elements impacted their behavior and impacted mine in response, gently nudging and shaping the reciprocal quality of our interaction.

Not only did these elements impact our interview, but the emotional quality of the interviews and the ways in which the participant and I positioned each other relationally affected and produced slightly different situations in each interview. That is, my participants are all different people and thus had different reactions to being interviewed, to me as an interviewer, and to the discussions we were having. Basics like tone, pitch, and speed, were as unique as one would expect, with some participants speaking excitedly at a rapid fire pace (Sophie, Rebecca) and others thinking and talking more slowly (Meghana, Lillian). On a basic level, all participants seemed happy to do the interview (thanking me, seeming engaged) and some were noticeably enthusiastic throughout the interview.

Some participants tended to package disagreement more softly, or use more qualification (Meghana and Caitlin particularly) while others (like Lillian and Rebecca) felt comfortable stating their views pretty directly, with little equivocation. Some participants were more ready to point out agreement, or to not disagree with me outright (Hannah), while others would state plainly if they felt I had it wrong or they didn't agree with what I was saying (Rebecca).

Even within a single interview, participants often displayed very different emotions, sounding at some points discouraged, exhausted, or hopeless and at other times bright and enlivened. How participants approached the questions conceptually also differed — Lillian and Sophie, for example, frequently and throughout the interview would come back to previous places in the conversation or unfurl new connections to the topic while some other participants tended to answer in a straightforward or definitive way and move on.

Who the participants were speaking to, and as, varied as well — for most of the participants it was the first time we had spoken (aside from email) and the transcripts show us, amongst other things, meeting and discerning who the other is, and who each of us will be for the other. Some women seemed to be clearly speaking on behalf of their organizations, giving answers at times that sound very much like they have given them before: 'party lines' so to speak. A diverse range of comfort with personal disclosure also showed up in the interviews, from those who readily reacted to and shared intimate connections to the topic and questions to others who had to be prompted several times to get any information at all about their personal stake or experience of the work.

Some participants seemed to feel very at ease with the interview situation while others were more hesitant: backtracking or commenting on their inadequacy to answer the questions. As this previous observation would suggest, confidence was a differing variable amongst participants: some seemed comfortable in the role of 'expert' while others shied away from it, making self

deprecating comments or highlighting their own limitations (this was particularly true of student participants, Meghana and Sophie, who were a bit more hesitant to acknowledge their own knowledge and value).

What the participants made of me, or how they positioned me, and indeed how I showed up for the interview differed as well. Frequently there seemed to be ongoing relational negotiation across and throughout interviews as to who is the ‘expert’ or who is in charge of the interviews. Participants can be seen in the transcript trying to place who I am, ranging from asking me about the structure of the interview, referencing certain academic works, authors, or ideas with more or less tenacity, or commenting in a self aware manner on the nature of the research (where am I planning to publish?).

What the participants focused on as most central about my identity is often apparent through the kinds of questions they asked of me (if they asked any at all): some seemed to see me primarily as a therapist, others as an academic, while others attended to and positioned me more as a fellow and collaborator to discuss ideas with. The tone and language of our conversations differed across conversations too: my language with Sophie, Rebecca and Meghana, for example, is noticeably more similar to their own speech. As these interviews progress, one can see me picking up the participants’ particular phrasing or style of speech (adopting Rebecca’s recurrent “for sure!” or frequently laughing and affirming — “right, right” — along with Sophie’s effervescent style). These interviews tend to also be ones where our conversation style is more that of peers.

Many points in each of the interviews see me attempting to return expertise to the participants by frequently thanking them, expressing admiration for their work, or being quick to reassure them or positively frame their responses if they deride them or express uncertainty. One

can also observe a fair amount of bumbling on my part, which in and of itself might denude me of my role as expert researcher.

Often I ask long and sometimes rambling questions that involve several parts. At times my questions can be several closed options rather than open ended queries, and most of the time they come packaged with context and connections to what the participant or I have already said so far. Sometimes the participants have difficulty understanding me and I must repeat my question, typically apologizing several times.

Apologizing was a frequent theme seen in my responses — for technical difficulties, obtuse phrasing, time limitations, to name only a few. There is a sense of appreciation and admiration throughout my responses and across interviews, but also some sense that I want the participants to like me (which is probably true!). For artist participants, like Rebecca and Lillian, I compliment their other works, asking Rebecca for a copy of a play she produced. From my end, this respect and admiration was genuinely felt — though sometimes feels cringingly obsequious upon my subsequent readings — and was usually reciprocated with compliments and respect from my participants for the academic work I do.

There are many places in the transcripts, however, that also see me attempting to disavow or downplay my connections to the worlds of academia and psychology, typically in an effort to encourage my participants to feel free to criticize the limits of those worlds (to which I belong) or in order to join with the participants around our shared views, rather than our differing subscriptions. Overall and across interviews, I tend to emphasize my similarities to the participants and minimize our differences.

Though this glimpse is brief, it is my hope that it provides a stabilizing and necessary counterpoint to the condensation that must occur in the pages to come. However grand the



conclusions, interpretations, and implications in the next chapters rise, may the reader bear in mind that they emerge from humble, human beginnings: that just as Sophie was offering one of the most keen and heartbreaking explications of the different lived experiences of men and women I've ever heard, my cat's tail flits across the screen in the recording.

Or that when Lillian responded that to look out on the objectification of women happening globally is to see “the end of the world” her voice broke with such a tone of sadness that it stayed with me for weeks. Or that right after Rebecca brilliantly outlined several historical moments in which society has resisted the opening and pouring forth of the suffering of women, we shared a few minutes of howling, cackling laughter over how much she was using the word “fuck.” These were real and important moments, that scaffold — hold up, support, form the basis — of this research as well.

If what I am advocating for within this research is a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which person and context co-constitute each other, then it is important to me to model such a sensitivity in the writing of the research as well. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write: “there is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made” (p. 4) and my hope is that this research produces new knowledges not only by way of its reported results, but through a writing and a reading structurally informed by the theorists I am employing. This section serves to remind the reader that just as I argue women are built from their cultures, so too was this knowledge and this research built from a social and interpersonal situation.

### ***Content: What did I hear?***

Having laid a practical and relational basis, I will now move to describe the general

structure of the experiences my participants relayed to me. As informed by close and careful readings in the first methodological moment, this section attempts to condense and capture the basic or essential story told to me by my participants. Fitting with this chapter's title — scaffolding — this summary obviously and necessarily erases some of the unique and individual differences between accounts and participants, which will be brought back with greater focus in the next chapter. However, the purpose of this section is to acquaint the reader with a general sense of why these women began working with these issues, why they chose the media they did, and how they see their work and their suffering fitting in with or resisting rubrics of feminism, systemic views, and other forms of activism and cultural change.

All of the participants identified that attending to women's issues and issues of sexism was an interest forged out of personal experiences. All but one of the participants — Caitlin — also noted that this thread of thinking began far before the particular actions I interviewed them about. Some participants saw this awareness as quite historical, even life long — Lillian notes that as an Asian-American she experienced from childhood a kind of “double consciousness” regarding her racial identity and was “in this sense primed already for then thinking about that through the lens of gender” (LH2).

Hannah and Rebecca, both of whom identify as survivors of sexual assault, also see a history of working with women's issues throughout their lives. Rebecca noted that themes of gender had already been topical in her art which often stemmed from “how I've experienced injustice” (RN6). As an undergraduate student, Hannah had also worked in a women's shelter for victims of domestic violence, and describes, “it took me until my third year of being there to realize that I had been in abusive relationships before” (HB2), a disturbing realization for her.

Sophie and Meghana both see their interest in women's issues as part of a longer journey,

though they also recalled some specific personal memories around their entry into college that motivated them to become more involved in advocacy and activism. Meghana describes doing a research project her senior year of high school on what college life was like and being shocked and dismayed to find that women at University of Michigan, where she planned to attend, felt “restriction in their use of public space” and that “all these opportunities were being presented to them but they only had access to a few” which they had to work “twice as hard or even three times as hard” as their male peers to obtain (MK11).

Sophie remarks: “my parents are pretty liberal, but when I was growing up I didn’t really know how to do that in a way that worked for me...[so] my feminism initially just grew out of like, really, really, basic personal frustration with things that were happening to me” (SH11). She particularly describes coming to college as a young woman and feeling conflicted about negotiating expectations, both in terms of people taking her seriously intellectually and in terms of her sexuality, commenting: “I didn’t really know how to navigate my sexuality, like I would hook up with people and then feel *bad* about it. And then feel *guilty* for feeling *bad* and I didn’t know what that was supposed to mean” (SH11).

Though all participants eventually found classes, books, or other people that helped them find a language and community of support for their struggles with gender, usually their inspiration was personal, not theoretical or political. Sophie notes that her initial concern for women’s issues was prompted by: “just like these very, very personal things. It didn’t come out of reading feminist literature or feminist critical theory or anything, it came out of just kind of my own insecurities” (SH12). Caitlin too notes that “*After* the project I read a lot of feminist texts, and after that I was very proud of course to call myself a feminist. I always was, you know, but it was just the word” (CB4).

Aside from personal experiences with sexism, participants sometimes offered additional reasons why they chose to start advocating on behalf of women, and what they saw as major social problems for women and girls. Many pointed out that they chose to advocate for women because they feel there is a great need that is going unmet.

Meghana notes: “this is a huge issue that no one is talking about, that no one cares about, and I personally don’t wanna go along with it” (MK4). Sophie similarly points out: “it’s not a minority issue, it’s the fact that like half of human beings have vulvas [laughing] you know? And so it’s not really like a niche issue. It’s an issue of the majority” (SH15). In many cases, a lack of awareness on the part of the broader culture was cited as part of the participant’s motivation to do activist work for women.

Personal feelings also certainly played a part for many participants: Lillian describes feeling “so deeply sad and enraged about what happens to women and girls” (LH8) and Caitlin similarly shared this anger, remarking: “I get really angry when I see an article about Hillary [Clinton] and her outfit and hair, you would never see that about Bill! I really hate how our society attempts to demean women, to put us back in our place” (CB6).

Though all of the jams featured here focused on either body image or sexual assault, participants added a myriad of other concerns to the list of major problems that women face in society. Gender identity, reproductive rights, “photoshopping and the thin ideal” (CB6), discriminatory laws and legal statutes, media representation, day to day felt sense of vulnerability, economic disparities, and a basic social inequality — “if you assigned a number to it, our value is less” (LH57) — were all offered as areas in which the participants felt personal and/or social concern. As will be elaborated much more completely in the following chapters, all participants cited social and systemic factors impacting what they perceived as these major problems for

women and girls, and contributing to their own personal distress.

But does advocating for or caring about these issues make one a feminist, and is feminism a useful ideology, label, or rhetoric? While all participants identified unfair social systems that hurt women, and all participants personally described themselves as feminists (though for some, particularly Hannah and Caitlin, the personal label of “feminist” was a more recent acquisition) there were varied opinions amongst the participants about the utility of using the word feminism with other people, or to describe their work.

Again the implications of this diversity will be explored much more conceptually in the following chapter, but there seemed to be an overall distinction that participants felt between the *ideas* of feminism, and the *label* of feminism. Some participants felt it was important to use the word — Lillian was particularly uncompromising about this point — some felt conflicted about using it, and others felt the label was more or less irrelevant and it was the concepts of equality that mattered the most.

Hannah notes that the Pink Loves Consent and Playboy jams do not use the word feminism anywhere — as Victoria’s Secret or Playboy wouldn’t! — and that she often does not use it when doing workshops, but “it’s implied in the work... I’m not avoiding the term, but what I’m doing is I’m describing what feminism is” (HB27). Caitlin, Hannah, and Rebecca — and to a slightly lesser extent, Meghana and Sophie, who were more ambivalent about the political trappings of feminism — seemed to take a similar tact in promoting a destigmatization of feminism where they felt they could, but also not hesitating to shy away from the term if they felt it would do more harm than good. Caitlin notes:

“I try to work it into my presentations now, you know, I’m proud to be a feminist... its

good for people to see that feminists are normal people [and] I do hope that people can use Operation Beautiful to feel proud of being a women and feel stronger being women. And if they make that connection to feminism in their mind that's great, but if not they already are! It's just label." (CB4)

Sophie also felt the use of the feminist label wasn't necessarily important, recalling an instance with two friends, where one was demanding the other identify as a feminist:

"and she wanted me to agree with her and I was like 'uh-uh, *no*, you can be an empowered woman and not identify as a feminist and that's ok' ... and this particular friend I happen to know that she is a really empowered person, has really interesting thoughts and these things, but doesn't want to identify with that movement" (SH13).

Lillian, however, felt that avoidance of the term feminism was "just a symptom of the problem" (LH34) and encouraged not a separation of the term from the ideals, but a rejoining of them, remarking:

"You need to say I'm a feminist and this is what a feminist is. And I would say turn it around, and not make it not about me, make it about the person who's asking, saying 'well aren't you a feminist? You know, what do you think it is? And why aren't you a feminist?... you don't think men and women should be equal?' ... that's what we need to do." (LH35)

Participants offered varying levels of sympathy and understanding for why people would not want to be involved with feminism or labeled feminists, ranging from total confusion (Lillian) to emphatic protection of those who would choose to eschew the feminist label (Sophie and Meghana). All but Lillian were able to offer reasons that they understood why people would distance themselves from feminism, including misconceptions and stereotypes, but also serious critiques of feminism that they felt were legitimate. These included that feminism is “exclusive” (HB26), too wrapped up in “fighting about what we stand for” (MK21), or “really academic, so then it’s really classist and it’s also real white” (RN26). Concerns about the limitations of labeling something feminist abounded, with participants noting, “if I was organizing an event I would never say ‘oh feminist rally!’” (CB4) and citing “too many boundaries” (SH16) around the term, which in turn “limits the amount of impact you can have” (MK18).

Questions of impact, exclusivity, and audience were often integral to participant accounts of why they chose the specific creative actions that they did. Meghana’s goal with No Shave November for Consent was to “generate conversations between males in a space where sexual assault is not discussed at all” (MK8) and Lillian notes about BJTWYA that “it doesn’t distinguish the audience” (LH21) and that “people who stand before magazine racks are of *all* sorts, across every type of category that you could think of” (LH3).

Describing her choice to engage in social media based work particularly, Hannah remarks that “it’s the only way that I know how to mobilize that many people in that many different places simultaneously” (HB18) and that FORCE wanted and needed “a more public platform” (HB5) to discuss issues of sexual assault. Rebecca too notes that “both Hannah and I were doing work that was doing lots of the same things that FORCE does. And then we found a vehicle that was just really fucking effective” (RN17). All but Meghana also emphasized the importance of “visual

culture” (HB21), “visual impact” (LH7), and media, citing that familiarity with and understanding the impact of the visual effect of media was part of why they began acting creatively *through* media.

Only Hannah and Rebecca had extensive knowledge and history with the term culture jamming; Rebecca had done a fellowship with activist and culture jamming group The Yes Men and FORCE collaborated with them — as well as researching and reading about other jams — before beginning Pink Loves Consent. Meghana and Sophie were made aware of the term through Hannah and Rebecca, and Caitlin and Lillian had never heard of it before I used it (though they both agreed their work fit within it).

Though the participants all enumerated multiple benefits to working creatively, including greater access to an undifferentiated audience and avoidance of the stigma and limits of certain platforms, or labels, they all also identified limits to the work they do. Namely, none perceived it as a total cure for all of society’s ill, nor even as a completely new form of enacting social changes. All of the participants identified the need for other forms of social transformation, including education, formal protest, interpersonal interactions, and law and policy making. Some participants identified their work within these general themes, while others more specifically felt they fit in with a history of “subversive infiltration of thought through media” (SH32-33) or various kinds of cultural “interruption” (LH48) like striking.

Rebecca points out that culture jamming offers something new to the world of advocacy via “synthesizing things, like synthesizing sexual assault awareness with pop culture and different ideas” (RN4). Many participants, particularly Caitlin, Hannah, Rebecca, and Sophie, emphasized that culture jamming works by being “sneaky” (e.g. SH29) though this took different forms. Caitlin voiced that “you’re never going to change the media” (CB8) which is “this huge beast that



we have to sneak around” (CB9) while others felt that the media could be infiltrated and used as a tool. Meghana notes:

“there’s the idea in feminism that, you know you can’t dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools... you can’t work within the system and enact change. You have to work outside the system, create a new system and create a new language for you. But, I don’t know, this is the reality we live in... this is what we have, so [we need to be] working with people and corporations that do have power” (MK30).

Rebecca seems to negotiate these two poles, remarking that though culture jamming works through the media, it defies it at the same time:

“I think [that’s] what’s so great about culture jamming because it’s like you can’t fucking co-opt it! You know?... it’s such a good tool because it’s like we’re building a counter culture but because we’re using the tools of the dominant culture, it’s really hard for the dominant culture to regurgitate it in a way that’s inaccurate” (RN29).

This notion of providing an alternative message, or building a counter culture, was also an important factor in the participants’ choice to engage in creative and media based activism, and part of why they thought people connected with the jams.

Rebecca remarks that culture jamming can give people hope: “it gives people something tangible to imagine instead of feeling like ducks in this game” (RN9). Though they do this differently, all participants took issue with media messages currently available to and about

women, as well as a desire to somehow interrupt, change, or provide an ameliorative to those messages. Hannah, Rebecca, Sophie, and Meghana's jams are directed more at working through media and changing the messages available through media, while Lillian and Caitlin take a slightly different tact of interrupting media messages and providing an alternative outside the medium.

The specific limits of culture jamming and creative activism were also acknowledged and explored in the interviews, and all participants saw limits to their work. For some, like Caitlin and Lillian, this was a more general sense that creative activism formed only one part of a complex set of changes that need to happen, which they were a part of bringing awareness to. Raising awareness about an issue was cited as one of the main beneficial uses of culture jamming — because of its ability to reach many people and use of flashy and attractive packaging — but this benefit was also frequently cited as a limit.

Hannah, Rebecca, Sophie, and Meghana were particularly concerned about the ability of creative actions to produce long term change or “keep the conversation going” (SH35). Rebecca points out: “I think that that is where it could very easily fail is that we could have all of these conversations, we could raise awareness, and then not move it an inch, you know?” (RN20). Follow up or figuring out “what do you do with the attention you get” (HB31) was a troublesome problem for activists, especially Hannah, Rebecca, and Sophie.

Meghana also notes that “the quality of the [culture jamming] messages are sometimes diluted because people will only read like one or two sentences and if they're not really catchy, or if they're not really interesting, then they're just going to move on to the next thing on the Internet” (MK12). That is, the very things that give creative activism its ‘punch’ — appearing in the everyday space, using media, packaging ideological messages like advertisements, and engaging massive audiences — are the very same things that threaten its long term utility.

While Hannah notes that "if we look like a Public Service Announcement, we're gonna be experienced like a Public Service Announcement, or dismissed like a Public Service Announcement" (HB10) there are also perils to looking like and being experienced like an advertisement, namely that people fail to understand the full message or do anything besides see the jam, think it's cool, and move on. Hannah points out that this limit need not be a detraction from culture jamming as a medium, but merely an illumination of how it fits in with other kinds of work, saying: "it takes these flashy actions in order to capture people and get them involved. But it also takes slow, incremental work: conversations, dialoguing, communities, policy change, you know?" (HB51)

Sophie remarks that "this has the power to put the issue on the radar [but] I don't know that it has the power to actually teach about what consent is in a meaningful way, just 'cause it is so sensational" (SH57) and that "I wonder how far people can internalize these things that we're doing... like how does that actually translate into the real world?" (SH4). Rebecca also notes that "culture jamming can be criticized on its own as not really doing that much in the real world" (RN4). This criticism partly inspired efforts by FORCE to continue follow up from both the Playboy and Pink Loves Consent jams by interacting with college campuses, hosting the Consent Awards, and otherwise encouraging non-digital activism and awareness.

Lillian also sees large scale impact as a potential issue for culture jamming, though due more to sheer numbers than a sense of sustainability, noting:

"I was gonna say no matter how massive this effort was, let's just say the poster... it would never be enough to make a dent in the gargantuan machine. And yet, you know as I say that I also think well that's not really true. You know I can imagine it actually making a

difference. If people started doing it everywhere... then maybe” (LH28).

A more thorough discussion of how the participants felt creative activism constituted an effective tool for cultural change, including its limits and applications, will take place in the next chapter.

Finally, all participants felt that engaging in creative activism has had a personal effect on their lives, with some differences as to what that effect particularly was. All participants identified some positive aspects of their work and ways in which it has been therapeutic for them or changed them. Hannah describes “it’s been really, really, really empowering” (HB44) and Sophie remarks “basically like 10 clicks on the Internet had one of the most tremendous effects of my life” (SH52).

Particularly important about the experience for participants was a feeling of “connection with other people” (LH47) and of individual efficacy: a sense that they personally actually could change something that bothered them in society. Caitlin poignantly remarks: “I just wanted to be something that mattered” (CB7). Hannah also speaks about a need to “be active,” commenting that even if we provide a language for people to describe difficult experiences, “if I didn’t have anything to do about it I still wouldn’t have talked about it” (HB48).

Rebecca points out that healing from trauma is fastest and best for “people who are connected to something bigger than themselves... where people can engage in the healing process [and] where they’re also connected to something that’s political” (RN8) demonstrating how connecting with others and engaging real political change were crucial for her and others’ healing. Hannah described the first showing of the Monument Quilt in Baltimore and a speech that Rebecca gave regarding how many arsonists are victims of childhood sexual abuse and recalls Rebecca saying ““I had that experience, I’ve had that inclination, but in doing this work I’ve realized that I

can get more attention and it's much more satisfying to blanket the entire national mall with these stories of survivors than to burn a building down'" (HB39-40).

Though I asked the participants about the effect of their creative activism on their personal lives and the lives of others separately, these questions turned out to actually be deeply intertwined. That is, the personal impact that participants felt was often inextricable from the sense that they were helping others or hearing about how others have received their work. Meghana particularly elucidated this point, saying that activism can be:

"A kind of negative experience, especially when people don't want to listen to you. But a lot of times we don't give men enough credit to actually care about this and we lure them in — for our events last year with the fraternities we ordered Buffalo Wild Wings and we gave them goodie bags at the end with free condoms and safe sex products. And you know when it came down to it, and they told us this, that they were actually just interested in talking to us and seeing how we could work together. They said specifically, 'you don't need to come up with these gimmicks to get us to care about it. We all know sexual assault is bad'..... those are the moments when I know I'm doing something good, and that's when it makes those moments when you're feeling overwhelmed with how unfair everything is feel better. It makes it kind of ok, because at least these fraternity guys who you never thought would actually care about sexual assault are listening to us and wanting to work with us and willing to listen to what we have to say. When people do that, it makes everything worthwhile." (MK23-25)

Caitlin also beautifully illustrates how intertwined questions of self and other are in this

kind of work, remarking:

“For me, my therapists would say you should have a positive mantra and look in the mirror and say positive things about yourself. And that’s all good things, but it’s really hard to say nice things about yourself and it’s really challenging to believe it. One of the nice things is you write these notes and subconsciously you begin to realize this applies to me too.” (CB7)

Rebecca and Caitlin both reported receiving feedback from fans who “feel really isolated in caring about this issue” (RN9) and point out how the connectedness they feel is shared by those who find the jams, and that both activist and audience are importantly healed by this connection. Connectedness was particularly crucial for Lillian, who describes:

“I think just connecting to others is therapeutic... [and] this project I think brought up so many examples of how that was happening. Because someone saw this slipped inside in a magazine and they were sitting at the doctor’s office and they discovered this... Or because they were actually going to buy some magazine and they went to the CVS and they saw it. What I heard through their statements and their messages to me was it connected. And what’s so fulfilling for me was that I then felt connected to them. I felt I had done something for them. It was such a small thing, to give them a poster that they can put up in this very mundane place, in part of their daily lives. And, I felt very good about that.” (LH12-13)

Though much has been condensed, erased, or summarized in this (both too brief and too long) descriptive account, it is my hope that this gives the reader a sense of the basic structure of the interviews, types of questions, and categories of response that my participants gave. Let us now move to unpacking these basic accounts in more detail and to illuminating how the interviews addressed my specific ideas about the capacity for creative activism to function as a cultural therapeutic.

## Intersection 1: Other materials

As research somewhat necessarily extracts any subject from its full environment – and since context is precisely the key to this dissertation – these intersections are provided to help bring back some of the context of the research situation (and provide a break in the text!). These sections contain bits and pieces I collected during the year of the research, including materials from events I attended, incidents of culture jamming I saw, conversations with participants, and other related news and things that caught my eye. This material serves to remind readers that while I was writing this dissertation I was of course also living in the world, connecting to new ideas, and being continually inspired by new works and concepts.

### What Are Museums For? The Guerrilla Girls

Date:

**Mar. 20, 2013**

**CARNEGIE  
MUSEUM OF  
ART**

Cost:

**\$15 (\$12 members/\$10 university students); Tickets required and non-refundable; call 412.622.3288**

Exhibit/Exhibition Hall:

**Carnegie Lecture Hall**

Time:

**7:00 pm - 8:00 pm**

Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous group of feminists fighting sexism in the art world, will stage a multimedia performance in full jungle drag. The artists will illustrate their history of creating posters, books, and actions to expose discrimination in areas including art, film, and politics. Carnegie Museum of Art director Lynn Zelevansky will engage in a dynamic exchange of ideas with the Guerrilla Girls about the evolving role of women in the art world. *Empowering Women* exhibition open 5–9 p.m. in Carnegie Museum of Natural History. \$15 (\$12 members/\$10 students); Limited seating; Tickets required; Purchase tickets [online](#).


I attended this event while still in the proposal stages of the project and learned quite a bit from The Girls about their history and the early history of culture jamming in the art world.





## Letter for grant? Inbox x



 **Leah Boisen** <leah.boisen@gmail.com>  
to Hannah, Rebecca ▾

Jan 7 ☆




Hi Hannah and Rebecca,

I just wanted to touch base and see if you still wanted me to write a letter of endorsement for the grant/funding you were seeking. Of course i am happy to do whatever i can to help out, just let me know!

Thanks so much again for your wonderful interviews - as the holiday dust is finally settling i'm transcribing them and really appreciating again your work and our conversations.

Happy (belated) new year!

Best,  
Leah

 **Hannah Brancato** [REDACTED]  
to me, Rebecca ▾

Jan 7 ☆




Hi Leah,

Yes! We'd be grateful for a letter from you, (general, not for a particular foundation) with the purpose of putting The Monument Quilt and FORCE's work into the context of your research about activism and healing. Our intent is to put the project into the context of current research that is advancing the anti-sexual violence field as a whole so that potential funders see the important of the work, beyond as a symbol or a gesture. Does this give you some information to work with? Feel free to reply with any q's you have.

Attached are 2 grants we've written so far, so that you have some language- and you can also refer to [themonumentquilt.org](http://themonumentquilt.org).

We both enjoyed talking with you and are interested in learning more about your work.

...

 **Leah Boisen** [REDACTED]  
to Hannah, Rebecca ▾

Feb 11 ☆



Hey ladies,

So here's a draft i worked up for a grant endorsement letter, but please let me know if i'm off the mark! I don't mind at all doing something different.

Based on my past experience with grants, i leaned into this one with a heavy science and outcome assessment hand. However, if you feel like it would be better to have something that focuses more specifically on my research and how i as a researcher/therapist endorse these issues just let me know and i'll rework it. I can also make it a more narrative/descriptive tone if you'd like - sometimes they want nothing but the facts, sometimes they want a little love and persuasion, you never know!

I went ahead and included all the references, though i was hesitant if you'd want them in there ultimately just style-wise. I figured it was better to include them and you can just yank them out if you want to.

I hope this is helpful and please just let me know if you'd like anything (or the entire thing!) changed!

Best,  
Leah

During my interview with Rebecca she asked if I would be willing to write FORCE a letter for grants from an outcomes and psychological perspective to help support their work, which I was very happy to do. Above are emails sent between Hannah and I regarding the letter and below is the version I sent to them

### Statement of the problem:

In the United States, roughly one in every four college aged women has been sexually assaulted or survived an attempted sexual assault at some point in her life (Koss, Gidycz, &

Wisniewski, 1987). This number, shocking, stark, and yet somehow still largely silent has been with us as a culture for years: it has not gone down or changed since it was first found by psychological researchers now nearly three decades ago. Culturally, we still struggle to see this number, and to see the effects produced by such a widespread and vicious social problem. Psychologically, however, the evidence is clear.

Rape does not simply affect the victims who suffer it. When a society allows rape to continue, particularly at the egregious rates at which it does in ours, the effects are felt throughout society and all its members. So widespread is the problem that the American Psychological Association (APA) recently commissioned a decade long task force dedicated solely to investigating the effects of sexualization on women and girls. Unsurprisingly, one of these effects is the proliferation of rape and sexual assault, alongside a hesitation about or outright prohibition on speaking about rape and sexual assault (APA executive summary)

Additionally, researchers found ample evidence that sexualization and sexual assault produces significant declines in women and girls' physical health, mental health, cognitive functioning, and emotional well-being, as well as markedly impeding the development of healthy sexualities, attitudes, and beliefs (APA executive summary). Assault or attempted assault has such diverse and far reaching effects as decreased performance on intellectual tests, depressed mood, somatic problems (headaches, weight gain or loss, tremors, etc), increased body shame, and decreased sexual assertiveness, including condom use, to name only a few (Cohen & Ross, 1987). And these problems do not belong to the women who face them alone: depressed mood and impaired cognitive functioning frequently lead to poorer performances at work and in school (Grauerholz & King, 1997). Anhedonia – the loss of pleasure accompanying depression – and body shaming in turn often means relationships with peers, family, and potential partners suffer (McConnell, 2001). Decreased sexual assertiveness of course means more sexual assault, more unprotected sex, and greater rates of unwanted pregnancy and disease. Rape is everyone's problem.

### **Imperative of a solution:**

How then can we address such a widespread social problem? The answer, of course, is that the solution must be widespread and social as well. In order for rape to be reduced and eliminated, it must come out of the shadows and silence and be shown for what it truly is: a *social* (not merely individual) problem directly affecting roughly 12% of *our entire population* and indirectly affecting virtually everyone else.

Research across the board consistently finds better and more positive outcomes for women who tell someone following an assault or attempted assault (see Cohen & Roth, 1987, for a meta-analysis). So strong is this correlation that reporting is said to be a predictive factor; that is,

researchers can predict with a high amount of accuracy how negatively a women will be affected by an assault based on whether or not she was able to tell others about it. This finding in particular is imperative to heed: women being able to speak about sexual assault is not just a nice thing to do, or some ancillary concern to the question of sexual assault; it is at the heart of it. While we work to end rape preventatively, it is imperative in the mean time to allow women to speak. This serves not only to illuminate the problem for us, but also to help minimize the damage already done to our society's women. Among their suggestions, the APA directly advocates for public awareness and the creation of "programs that help [women and] girls feel powerful" and "build nurturing connections with peers" in order to reduce incidences of sexual assault and the resultant health disparities for women (APA executive summary).

Projects such as The Monument Quilt play a crucial role in ending the silence of rape, creating spaces for women to speak the truth about sexual assault, and helping to reduce these disparities in women's mental and physical health. Psychological literature provides well documented evidence that women tend to respond best to interventions that are communal or co-dependent in nature, rather than solely individual or 1:1 (e.g. Gilligan, 1982). Hence it is to these kinds of interventions that we must look to help us create change and end the problem of rape. Advising women to go to therapy or deal with sexual assault as an individual problem is, clearly and simply, insufficient.

Rather, taking together the careful research of the APA among dozens of other researchers, a clear picture emerges: rape is a problem, social in nature and far reaching in its effects. Its solution lies in social interventions that allow women to share their experiences, educate others, and regain a sense of efficacy, empowerment, and connection to peers. The Monument Quilt elegantly addresses these concerns, and proposes an effective and creative solution. By intervening socially, creating space for women to speak about sexual assault, and raising public awareness, FORCE is well positioned to make a tangible and lasting impact on the fall out and future of rape culture.

As a member of the psychological community, a therapist, and researcher specializing in women's issues, I believe the work of FORCE is pivotal to improving the health of women and in turn, our entire society. Indeed, I recently interviewed both Hannah and Rebecca – founders of FORCE – for my current research focusing on social interventions to help reduce the occurrence of female-specific mental health problems, precisely because I believe so strongly in the critical nature of their work. It is my sincere hope that more organizations come forward in support of ending rape and recognize the crucial and effective nature of programs such as The Monument Quilt.

(References all available through main References page)



Graffiti on a bathroom stall in Duquesne University



American Apparel – often lauded as an ethical business for their stance against sweatshops – has particularly amped up their disturbing sexual imagery in ads over the past year. This poster was paired next to a long manifesto touting how “American Apparel is committed to an exploitation free workplace” on a store window, detailing the wages and benefits they pay their employees. The audacity of such self-congratulation next to this obviously exploitative image made my blood boil.



# Restaurant Responds to Review Requesting Servers 'Show Some Skin' In Clever Way

May 16, 2014

By STEFANIE TUDER via **GOOD MORNING AMERICA**



Atomic Grill in Morgantown, West Virginia responded to a review requester servers "show some skin" by offering a potato skin special.

Daniel McCawley

Not many restaurants have the chance to respond to a customer's review in a smart, effective and cheeky way. Atomic Grill in Morgantown, West Virginia, however, managed to do just that.

After a customer posted a review on UrbanSpoon -- which has since been deleted -- requesting that the servers show more skin, owner Daniel McCawley took matters into his own hands.

"It was brutish. I was upset. I'm a father of a 12-year-old girl and I've got five sisters," McCawley said. "The way that women are treated is pretty personal as far as I'm concerned."

Rather than just get upset, McCawley took action by giving the customer exactly what he or she asked for: more skin.

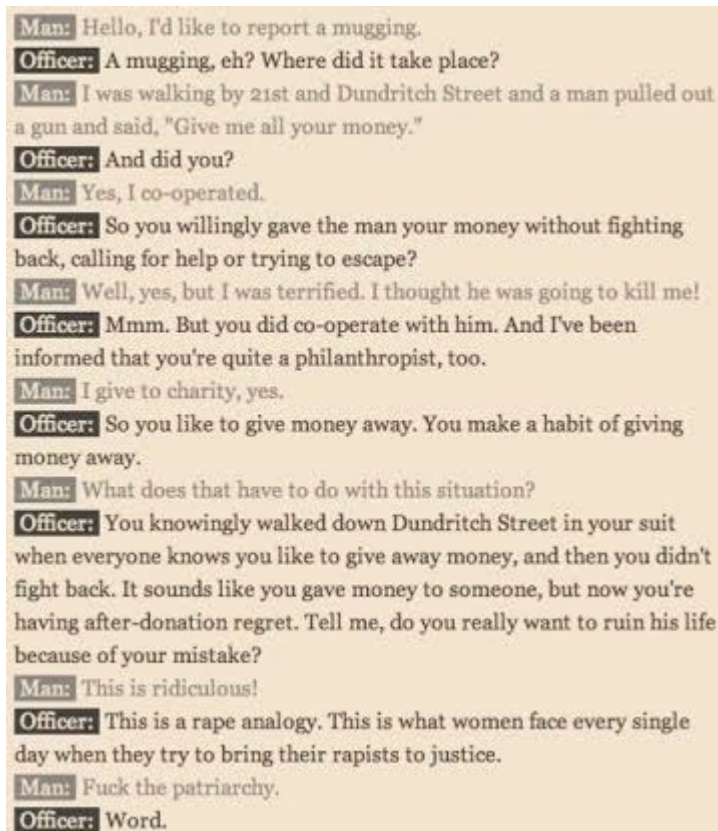


From now through Memorial Day, Atomic Grill will be offering a potato skin special for \$7, and 100% of the proceeds will go directly to the [West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information Services](#).

"We took offense to the review and wanted to flip it in a positive way," McCawley explained.

He said the restaurant has so far received a "tremendous" amount of support. "My Facebook blew up overnight," he said. "I really hope this will be a positive thing."

This restaurant's clever response to an individual act of misogyny reminded me of some of the ways in which culture jamming works, and put a smile on my face. My girlfriend and I drove to Morgantown to support them – the skins were great!



**Man:** Hello, I'd like to report a mugging.  
**Officer:** A mugging, eh? Where did it take place?  
**Man:** I was walking by 21st and Dunderbitch Street and a man pulled out a gun and said, "Give me all your money."  
**Officer:** And did you?  
**Man:** Yes, I co-operated.  
**Officer:** So you willingly gave the man your money without fighting back, calling for help or trying to escape?  
**Man:** Well, yes, but I was terrified. I thought he was going to kill me!  
**Officer:** Mmm. But you did co-operate with him. And I've been informed that you're quite a philanthropist, too.  
**Man:** I give to charity, yes.  
**Officer:** So you like to give money away. You make a habit of giving money away.  
**Man:** What does that have to do with this situation?  
**Officer:** You knowingly walked down Dunderbitch Street in your suit when everyone knows you like to give away money, and then you didn't fight back. It sounds like you gave money to someone, but now you're having after-donation regret. Tell me, do you really want to ruin his life because of your mistake?  
**Man:** This is ridiculous!  
**Officer:** This is a rape analogy. This is what women face every single day when they try to bring their rapists to justice.  
**Man:** Fuck the patriarchy.  
**Officer:** Word.



During the early stages of research, I found this version of a popular rape analogy, which makes rounds through social media and surges in popularity from time to time. I had no idea how old it actually was, finding another iteration of it in a feminist reader from the mid-70's while doing the Literature Review. The kind of double take (*détournement*) or surprising, novel framing certainly bears similarity to culture jamming and creative activism.





This handmade poster was wheatpasted to an electrical box outside of the Consol Energy Center at the bus stop

Article and Demographics

Inbox x

 Leah Boisen 

Feb 12 ☆

to Lillian ▾


Hi Lillian,

I thought of you recently when someone sent me [this New York Times article](#) highlighting the importance of men's voices in feminist conversation. Perhaps you've already seen it?



Thanks so much again for such an interesting and informative conversation - i am almost finished transcribing it now and it's been a pleasure to listen to again and begin thinking through more deeply.

I also wanted to ask just a couple basic follow up questions as i'm trying to get proper demographic data on my participants. Some of this i already have, like current location (Salem, right?) but i want to make sure i get your job title right (Cambridge Arts Council Director of Public Arts?) as well as your age and how you would describe yourself in terms of race and sexual orientation. Of course as with all parts of the interview if you would prefer not to answer i can just omit.

Thanks so much as always for your help. I hope the freeze isn't too deep up in Boston!

Lillian Hsu 

Feb 13 ☆



to me ▾

Hi, Leah,

Thanks for the link. I had not seen it, but I have read other good op-eds by Charles Blow. That link also led me to the Nicholas Kristof op-ed from this week which I also missed - he is another persistent male voice in advocacy for women and girls. And I just borrowed the new book written by the editor of Voice Male magazine (for whom I wrote that article) - Rob Okun. His book is [Voice Male - the Untold Story of the Profeminist Men's Movement](#), which is a collection of many different writers on the subject. Perhaps you know about it.

For the facts: yes, I'm in Salem, MA, and my job title is Director of Public Art for the City of Cambridge (Cambridge Arts Council). I'm 60 years old and identify myself as Asian or Asian-American. I'm Chinese but born in the U.S. I identify myself as heterosexual.

I look forward to the results of your research!

 Lillian Hsu 

to me ▾

Hi, Leah,

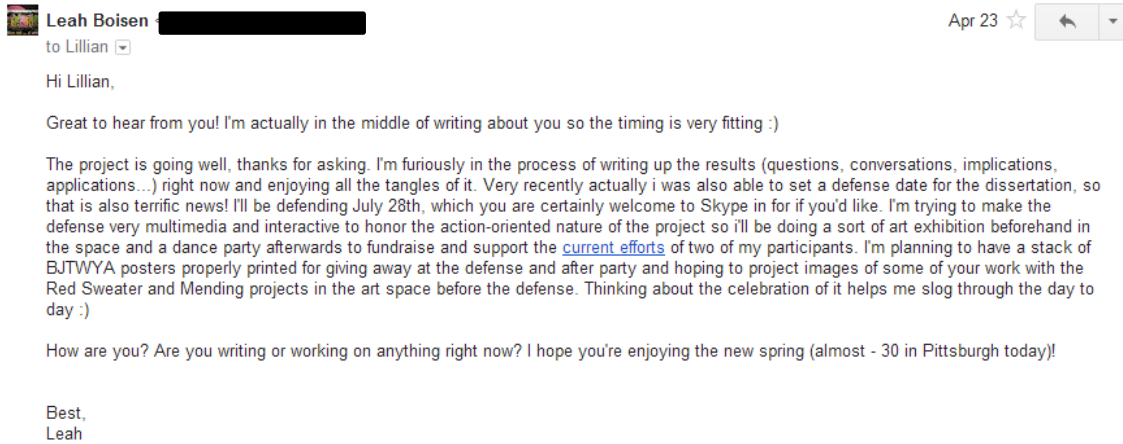
I thought of you recently when someone asked me about art and social change. How is your project going?

I hope this finds you well,

Lillian

...





A series of emails between Lillian and I exchanging articles and catching up



Graffiti on a bus – the interaction on this was interesting to me. It appears “I forgive you” came first and was amended with the (now very faint) “can’t” above it. The heart and some message that was then rubbed out appear to be by a third author. The interactive and unfurling nature of a small message struck me here as reminiscent of some of the work of my participants, particularly Operation Beautiful.



Photos from an event I attended in Lexington, KY promoting awareness of sexual violence and interpersonal violence, particularly in the queer community. Mary Lambert, a rising musician and queer advocate, played at the event, sharing several pieces focusing on violence against women, and members of the community were invited to speak and share stories. The powerful event ended in a candlelit vigil for victims of sexual assault everywhere.

## **Results 2: Questions and answers (or perhaps: conversations and applications)**

Having now laid a careful scaffolding, unfolding my participants' responses in general terms and providing a skeletal structure from which to view their experiences, I would like to move towards the more interpretive results of the research. Though I hope this has been clear already in my writing, I did not come to this project from no context or desire of my own. Rather, I pursued this topic with specific interests, motivation, and questions to which I was seeking elaboration through the research.

This chapter attempts to sort through some of those questions, which I asked my participants (and myself) and which produced interesting conversations and possibilities. Informed by the second and third methodological moments, I will continue throughout this chapter to highlight the ways in which these interpretations are always a product of the research situation, including the context of the interview as well as my role as interpreter, researcher, and arbitrator of answers.

This chapter's iteration of the research fruit does not then pretend naive interest in simply exploring the jammers' experiences, or describing the phenomenon. Rather, as I have outlined already, my research is explicitly ideological in seeking to decrease the systemic oppression of women in our culture, and is premised upon my own ideas, observations, and questions about how society interacts with women in damaging ways and how we as psychologists, academics, and activists may intervene.

Through my second and third sets of readings, I explored, and present here, how my participants and I worked together to unpack my questions, and how participants responded to my specific ideas about cultural sickness, therapeutics, and the role of creative activism. I have selectively attended in particular to participant comments and responses that hit at the concepts I

am most interested to explore. These concepts include suffering — particularly how suffering is systemic in nature and individual and social suffering are related — and healing, particularly what makes us heal individually and as a culture, as well as how specific practices, including feminism, therapy, or culture jamming may work towards healing.

Though I will return to the project's limitations again in the next chapter, it bears remarking at the outset that when I write of suffering and healing I am writing from the perspective of this particular project, in the present era in the United States, and even more particularly from the vantage point of the conversations I had with the six women I interviewed. Though I used the third reading to attend to differences and fissures, and have attempted to note throughout this chapter where participants differed or where only a few participants contributed to a conception, there is always much that is left out.

My findings about the ways that women suffer and heal are clearly not exclusive to women, nor are they true for all women, nor do they encompass all of the causes and potential solutions for women's suffering. Rather, I hope the following pages contain a useful explication and extrapolation of what my participants had to say about the theories and queries I brought to them, and how we made sense of these concepts together.

### ***Cultural sickness: Notes on women's suffering in contemporary American culture***

*"Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary" - Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (1985, p. 44)*

While up until now I have spoken of sickness, when I began to organize my thoughts on how to represent these fascinating conversations, to make use of and honor what my participants shared with me, I felt an immediate pull to another word: suffering. It has to start with suffering. For all of my participants, it always started with suffering; and for me too, it started with suffering. This research was born, after all, out of my four years' experience as a training clinician, of the suffering I was called to witness, and of the suffering I was called to cure. Or perhaps not to cure, but in any case to shift, to metabolize, to transform somehow, an alchemical psychic artist turning lead into gold.

This research is as much my participants' story as it is my own: a story of inadequacy in the face of suffering, a story of stunned silences and frustrated case formulations, a story of watching, listening, and suffering. My theoretical lines of flight throughout this research all emerge from questioning, conceptualizing, and putting the screws to this concept: how do women particularly suffer? Why do they suffer in these ways? Do they have to? Will they always?

Guided by my ideas as to how patriarchy may form a kind of cultural sickness which shows its symptoms through women, I asked my participants to speak to their experiences with suffering as women in the particular time and place that we share: the last few decades in the Midwest and East Coast of the United States of America. How have they personally experienced suffering as women in this culture, and what struggles do they see themselves and other women facing? What makes them angry, sad, or upset about our society? How and in what ways do we, as a culture, hurt our women? Are specific behaviors — such as eating disorders, depression, or sexual trauma — inevitable, individual, or social in nature?

It bears repeating here that the presence of sexism and its painful effects on women is taken as a premise, and not a hypothesis of this research, and I was open with my participants about my

thesis that ours is a sick culture that infects women with harmful ideologies of objectification and sexualization to devastating ends. The findings shared here do not attempt to catalogue all the ways in which women suffer, nor do I claim to offer these narratives as proof of a sexist culture.

However, I believe these accounts — in conjunction with the literature already reviewed and the theory that will be presented in the next chapter — present a vivid and compelling picture of some of the dynamics experienced in our culture that still act to oppress and selectively affect women in a negative manner. This section will then provide a jumping off point into discussing the work of my participants in more detail, as well as how the problems they faced caused them to think about healing and ultimately, begin their work.

### *Systemic sexism*

*“It’s the subtle things that happen” - Meghana Kulkarni*

I had little trouble finding illustration in the accounts of my participants for my ideas that society continues to systematically damage women in deep and far reaching ways. Together, the participants painted a portrait of a society whose very foundation includes sexual inequality, the effects of which are subsequently felt throughout all levels of the system. They vividly detailed the daily (and exhausting) invisible work of women: managing, assessing, fighting, despairing, questioning, and bargaining just to maintain a basically equal sense of rights and safety. They pointed to ways in which they feel trapped and silenced in society, from the most minute interactions to major public platforms and practices.

Perhaps most disturbing of all, my participants elaborated a tight, interlocking system that

subtly works against women and does it so effectively that it disappears into the background and renders the whole atrocity natural, logical, or inevitable. They spoke of a culture in which a thousand little instances build, day in and day out, one upon the other, until the result is a culture in which it appears natural that women are sexualized, objectified, and inferior, and in which rape, disordered eating, restriction, and constant feelings of vulnerability are logical outgrowths — though still “ghettoized” as “women’s problems” (LH17).

Participants spoke of a culture of common, everyday oppression against women — particularly through media and harmful discourses perpetuated through media — which is ubiquitous, calling it “this huge beast” (CB9); a “gargantuan machine” (LH28); or simply part and parcel of the “larger system we’re swimming in” (HB34). They identified “institutionalized sexism” (MK27) at nearly every level of their experience, from how their names are announced — “every time we name a couple it’s the man’s name that goes first... David and Laura. That’s John and Nancy... it’s embedded in the way we speak!” (LH39-40) — to basic self worth and the fact that “women who are valued for their input such as politicians are still required to look a certain way” (CB6).

From my participants’ perspectives, it is apparent that “the sickness is systemic, it’s the whole organism... it’s just the water we drink and the air we breathe” (LH24). Lillian comments that as she began to learn about violence against women through visual media then “I started to see it everywhere. *Everywhere*.” (LH8) and Meghana tiredly describes: “this *constant* devaluation of women’s abilities, women’s ways of doing things. Just constant push back against what women are trying to do in any field” (MK27-28). Hannah shared how sometimes it is difficult to even get people to acknowledge the oppressive role of culture, precisely because it *is* so viciously ordinary, remarking:

“[Sexual assault] isn’t the result of an individual’s choices or actions or their psychological makeup. It’s a result of the culture and the world we live in in. And even when we talk about what rape culture is... people push back and they say, like ‘really? Do we really live in a rape culture?’ And it’s like yes, exactly, you don’t see it; it’s the air you’re breathing and the water you’re swimming in” (HB32).

That both Hannah and Lillian spontaneously compared the environment of oppression and hostility to women to the most basic elements of air and water — comparisons Rowe also makes in her work on micro-inequities — speaks volumes to the deep roots of the issue. It seems there is little doubt, amongst the women I spoke to at least, that many of the problems women face — and that we individually hold women responsible for or that women feel responsible for — are actually products of a broken system. Discussing sexual assault awareness, Hannah broke off mid-sentence during our interview and commented:

“I was going to say as much as our culture might accept that rape is not the victim’s fault, but actually I don’t even think that’s true. I think that overwhelmingly people still *do* think that, even if they won’t necessarily say it out loud. But a lot of people will say that out loud! So I can’t even unfortunately say that.” (HB34)

Sexual assault stood out as a particularly clear indicator of sexism and ways in which women suffer due to being on the lesser end of our cultural power spectrum. Meghana comments that when people say sexism doesn’t exist: “you can kind of point to sexual assault and say ‘well,



then why is this happening to thousands of women? Why is this so slanted towards women survivors?” (MK28). Even something like sexual assault, a rather clear cut instance of one person abusing the rights and actual body of another person, is routinely treated as an individual anomaly or a question for individuals to deal with, *not* as a common part of the female experience and thus a social justice issue as well as an individual issue.

This is so much the case that young women like Meghana may have an arsenal of strategies for convincing disbelieving men that sexual assault even *occurs* and that it has something to do with sexual inequality. Hannah and Meghana’s comments also illustrate how even this fairly egregious and outright act of violence is often erased and called the fault of the victim, not of a community that allows violence against women to proliferate.

Media was seen as a particularly damaging tool for spreading harmful discourses about women in a number of ways. Outrightly, Hannah states that “women get really demonized in the media” (HB45) and that specifically, “[sexual assault] survivors are still re-victimized over and over again and re-traumatized [with] the way that the stuff is covered in the media” (HB36). Again even at the most blatant level of violence towards — rape — we find that media coverage so often focuses on the faults or character of the victims, leaving out any such analysis of the perpetrator, or failing to simply report about rape as an instance of crime and violence, not about individuals.

Media thus serves to perpetuate discourses of victim blaming, and to convey to future perpetrators, and to victims, that incidents of rape are not serious, horrifying, or even likely to end in consequence. This serves to re-victimize actual victims of rape, as they see other women dragged through the mud or triumphant perpetrators sound off to cameras — victims who have likely already been re-victimized by practices unfortunately common to post-rape medical exams, and certainly to courtroom proceedings. Additionally, however, it also silences women who will

become victims of rape, and reinforces that violence against women is not a serious issue. If such a characterization is true, the broader consequences of such a cultural norm on how we value and treat women are chilling.

Caitlin particularly emphasized “the general focus on appearance” in the media and the way the “thin ideal” (CB6) transmits through media and distorts women’s sense of value, beauty, and self-worth. She notes that this is most apparent when we look at how women in politics, economics, or intellectual fields that have nothing to do with looks are still subject to media reporting on their bodies and clothes as though they were movie stars or models:

“I get really angry when I see an article about Hillary [Clinton] and her outfit and hair - you would never see that about Bill! I really hate how our society attempts to demean women, to put us back in our place. It’s gone over a lot of people’s heads ‘Oh, of course we want to talk about what Hillary’s wearing.’ But no, we don’t... we don’t pay attention to stuff that matters because there’s only so much headspace and we spend a lot of time talking about who lost their beach weight. Just as a cultural phenomenon it makes me angry when things like that receive as much attention on the news.” (CB6)

Lillian described how media can be extremely confusing for young girls, who find within its pages or images both a purported tool for empowerment and a weapon of objectification and self-objectification: “It’s so mixed. I mean pick up any women’s, girls’ magazine and sure all those messages about ‘Love your body!’ and a thousand permutations of ‘Feel good about yourself!’ And it’s completely mixed in with all the completely opposite messages” (LH29).

Sophie too sensitively points out that problematically, media is not all-or-nothing villain,

but a more nuanced potential enemy: “the main problem with like ‘Seventeen’ [magazine]... what they’re saying, sometimes it’s super shitty, but sometimes it’s not actually not that bad, like sometimes what they’re saying is actually good. But *every single girl* in that magazine is this very classic American beauty” (SH18).

Sophie and Lillian’s comments illustrate how media does not simply hurt women by reporting on women or crimes against women in a slanted and biased fashion, but actually sets up a network of competing ideas and hegemonic images that leave women and girls unsure how to feel about their own bodies, or how to realistically evaluate themselves against others. This sets the stage for women to feel a sense of constant uncertainty, and to doubt their own decisions, judgments, or preferences. Rather than feeling empowered to trust themselves, women instead feel a pull to check in — with media, with others — to see if what they’re doing is ‘right,’ rather doing whatever they’d like to, or even exploring what it *is* they’d like.

Participants also cited other major social institutions in which they felt the deck was systematically stacked against women including, “a public housing system that’s really broken and fucked up and basically breaks up families and... destabilizes women” (RN28) and various economic strategies that keep women at a disadvantage. What participants felt were the most pressing economic issues, however, varied somewhat dramatically: Meghana felt that “accessing higher paying jobs” (MK27) was a major factor in perpetuating women’s dependence on men, whereas Rebecca passionately railed:

“Let’s talk about fucking domestic workers, let’s talk about the feminization of poverty, let’s talk about welfare. Welfare should be a *feminist* issue. It’s like single moms, WIC [women and infant care], let’s talk about that shit. Don’t talk to me about the glass ceiling

and three or four women who are already getting three figure salaries who should be getting more three figure salaries...what affects more people?” (RN28)

That participants presented such a range of disadvantages, even within the specific issue of economics, speaks to how thoroughly patriarchy has saturated our cultural attitudes — both the richest and the poorest women are still struggling to get their just due.

Aside from the major spheres of social life such as politics, economics, and media, participants felt the grind of institutionalized sexism creep into their most private interactions with others, and with themselves. Examples they gave included Meghana’s story of a female friend who had points taken off her presentation for higher intonation at the end of her sentences (a typically female speech pattern), her professor admitting it was a gendered difference but remarking that “it just didn’t come off as confident” (MK27).

Lillian also describes “the frequency with which I felt assaulted by magazine covers, it was so great because it’s *everywhere*” (LH20) and points to how the effect of media is not just an matter of distributing harmful messages that socially work against women, but is *personally wounding*. Her comments illustrate how encounters with media for many women constitute an assault they have to face every day and one that has serious consequences for how women feel about themselves and the other real women they know.

Rebecca discusses how sexism not only gets into our media or educational environments, but seeps into our very bodies and the ways in which women are able to feel comfortable as sexual and embodied people, saying:

“When you think about Victoria’s Secret, what they’re getting at is so deep. It’s how I feel

in my body and how I experience my body and what kind of confidence and comfort I have in *my* body. That's insane that a fucking corporation is trying to control that for me. And that's exactly what they're trying to do. That's how they sell panties." (RN23)

This heartbreaking example demonstrates how these discourses may be social in form, but they are also deeply individual, personal, and intimate — as intimate as having a body. Not only are women's feelings of comfort and confidence in their own bodies taken from them — stolen, raffled off, vivisected from their still living souls — Rebecca points to the truly laughable tragedy: it's not even for a good reason. The objectification of women is so common, so daily, so normative that it has become just another sales strategy. Not a crime, not an atrocity, not even a shame: just another way to sell panties.

Sophie too points out a coupling in which women's bodies and sexualities are dangerously packaged by mainstream discourse as inert and passive objects for men, setting the stage for women to feel voiceless and confused even in intimate relationships.

"It's so hard to step out of a culture that says kiss me without asking, you know? Or it's so hard to step out of a culture that says men should be throwing women against the wall, and if they don't want it, it's because you're not trying hard enough. That's a narrative that's given in a *romantic* way... so you're not internalizing it on even like this really *sexy* way... our narratives of *romance* are like that. It's so, so hard to step outside of that and sort of create an idea of what romantic life looks like for yourself and what sex looks like for yourself without anything to refer to." (SH59-60)

Sophie's comments highlight how virtually all of our sexual and dating scripts — seen and conveyed through movies, magazines, TV shows, the Internet, and our own social circles — position women as docile objects for consumption: the recipients, and not the initiators of romantic desire. This not only disables women from feeling comfortable to take a different role in their sexual or romantic — or interpersonal! — relationships, it also cuts off any alternative strategies or subjectivities from coming to consciousness.

In conducting this reading and analysis, I feel the truth and the weight of Lillian's words that inequality, objectification, and sexism are “completely folded into and integrated into what we think is normal, what we think is the way it's supposed to be. It is just the way it is” (LH27). Part of the purpose of this section has been to reassert the existence and the normative nature of sexism and to provide just a few of the myriad ways in which my participants affirmed that their suffering was deeply tied to the injustice they face in society. What then are the experiential effects of systemic sexism on women, or how did my participants describe the suffering of living within this culture of commodification?

### *Erasing, silencing*

*“It's about recognizing that you don't know that” - Sophie Hess*

What stood out to me perhaps the most as I analyzed the transcripts for examples of the cultural sickness of patriarchy was the theme of erasure: of being rendered invisible, silent, or nonexistent. Most frequently this was discussed as erasing the very fact *that* women suffer due to sexism in our society, a blunt and wounding denial that sexism even exists, or that women have

anything to complain about. Though I use the terms essentially interchangeably here, it is important to mark a subtle difference between silencing and erasing. That is, those who are silenced are at least *trying to speak*, whereas those who are erased are denied the very conditions for speaking. I believe both erasing and silencing dominate our culture's treatment of women, and that often the two go hand in hand.

Some women, like Sophie and Rebecca, speak to early awareness of the societal abuse of women that seemed at odds with how such crimes were being exposed or talked about in the mainstream. Others, like Meghana, were shocked to discover that all was not as it seemed, finding out later in life about the restriction, vulnerability, and difficulties women face and being unsettled that this was not the general picture of equality presented in mainstream discourse. Even *as women*, we are often cut off from our own history of suffering, discouraged from speaking it — even to each other — and some of my participants went many years before discovering they were not alone in their struggles.

Sexual assault again rose to the fore as a particularly violent and vivid atrocity committed against women with little if any recognition from the broader community of its widespread rates. After a detailed accounting of several historical moments when sexual abuse has almost risen to public consciousness, Rebecca remarks: “*Every time we’ve gotten really close to speaking this unbearable truth we’ve excused it, swept it under the rug, put a lid on it, called those people liars, and shut them down*” (RN22).

Rebecca and Lillian were the most historically aware amongst the participants, and highlighted several times how the erasing of women's suffering and silencing of women who have tried to speak up is not merely a product of our current cultural moment, but has a historical truth. Meghana and Sophie — the youngest of the participants, and thus theoretically the most privileged

beneficiaries of the work of generations of feminists before them — actually tended to be the most pessimistic about cultural recognition of sexism and sexual assault, even on their local campuses.

Meghana comments:

“A large majority of the population may not even realize that one in four women are sexually assaulted... I ask men on campus, just for my own personal interest I ask them: ‘How many women out of however many do you think are sexually assaulted on campus? Or on any college campus!’ And they say one in 50, or one in 100. And when I tell them it’s actually one in four, it’s like their eyes get wide.... It’s a real problem that people don’t take as seriously as they should.” (MK5)

Meghana, working specifically with men, tended to also be the most aware of how oblivious many men are to sexual assault, and the most weary of it. She describes:

“It’s just really exhausting, emotionally exhausting to keep advocating for the same things to people who don’t want to listen ...it’s always this *fight*... even within this one issue, telling men that they have to care about sexual assault even though it doesn’t happen to them as much” (MK20).

Meghana also had the most active strategies for convincing people that sexism exists, and that women still struggle for equality, including pointing to sexual assault as “this byproduct of sexism,” a strategy she calls “pretty effective... it gets some kind of reaction from them” (MK28).

Hannah and Rebecca’s current project, The Monument Quilt, focuses predominantly on



the social erasure of women's experiences, specifically with sexual assault, and Hannah notes, "we're still trying to get the problem recognized by even proposing that there *would* be a monument to survivors of rape. There *should* be a *visual recognition*" (HB36). This outrage and shock that even literal acts of violence go unrecognized, unseen, and unacknowledged – erased – by the general public was poignantly echoed in a personal story told by Sophie:

"I had this really fascinating conversation with the guy who I was dating... we were at a party and we were all doing this thing where we were all imitating each other. And his imitation of me was, [ditzy sounding] 'Oh I don't know, I just feel, like, feminism is, like, this thing!' And we were at this party and I was really angry about it!... I kinda held it in for a while and then about a week later I was like 'Can I just talk to you? That really pissed me off that you said that.' And he was like, 'I was just kidding, I care about equal rights too.' And that was what he said! And I thought it was just so fascinating. I was like 'Chris<sup>3</sup>, did you *know* that one in four women will be sexually assaulted by the time they leave college?' And he said 'What!?' He was like 'That's not true!' .... let that sink in for a minute. And we didn't talk for a minute. And he was like... 'so is that what you're talking about? Is that what feminism is? About that?' And I said 'No, it's not necessarily about that. It's about recognizing that you don't *know* that.'” (SH20-21)

I have told this anecdote to friends, colleagues, and coworkers probably a half a dozen times during this year over which the research has unfolded, as it strikes me as a moving and poignant assessment of the problem. That roughly a quarter of all college aged women have been

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<sup>3</sup>A pseudonym

sexually assaulted or survived an attempt seems daunting enough as a problem. Yet unfortunately, we as a society are not even ready to address that problem, because by and large, we don't even *recognize the problem*. The covering up, or covering over of violence and oppressive cultural forces working against women is, it seems, highly effective.

In addition to feeling that their experiences were nowhere to be found in the mainstream, or that the reality of women's bodies, lives, and sexualities was routinely distorted and erased, my participants were keenly aware of how much other people *bought* these distortions and how critically impoverished the social consciousness is when it comes to understanding the systemic roots of oppression. Sophie comments: "I was talking to my mom about this and I said 'I think it's almost like drunk driving.' And my mom was like 'Well, it's not like drunk driving, because people *know* they're not supposed to drive drunk.' People don't even know that they're not supposed to do this" (SH43). Though in both the instances of drunk driving and sexual assault, an innocent bystander is wounded, Sophie's comparison points out the radically different cultural treatments of these crimes, and the extent to which individuals fail to even recognize crimes against women *as crimes*.

Sophie's comments point out that the saturation of sexist ideals into our core values and cultural practices is so complete and thorough that many people don't even realize that hurting women — by making sexist comments, by enforcing stereotypes, or by outright violence — is something they're not supposed to do. Why would they, when our media, politics, economics, educational environments and indeed our entire cultural system normalizes it, every single day? Further, a discourse of sexism renders anything short of the most egregious acts of violence as not "real" rape, meaning many individuals may hurt or violate women without even realizing the connection between their behavior and women's experience of violation. When I asked her why

she was interested in working with women's issues, Meghana gave a small, resigned laugh and replied:

"I actually had a conversation with one of my friends recently about why people ask this question.... like it's something that's whatever, a crazy thing. People question [me] and say 'tell me why you are involved in that,' and it's kinda funny because you wouldn't necessarily ask those same questions to someone who was working on poverty issues in Africa, you know? ....This is a huge issue that no one is talking about, that no one cares about." (MK4)

Not only are women's experiences covered up and individuals silenced, but attempts to break this silence and to advocate for women are, as Meghana reports, often met with confusion or resistance — why would anyone advocate for women? What do they still need advocating for? Aren't people already working on that? So complete is the erasure of women's suffering that many people don't even understand that there is an issue — in fact, an entire population — in need of activism and change.

Sophie comments that even at Oberlin — one of the most liberal colleges in the country, among the first in the nation to admit female students in addition to male, and nationally recognized as an activist community — "sexualized violence doesn't have a radar the way that the fracking movement does" (SH37). While environmental issues are certainly critically important, it seems a strange injustice that they would receive more local attention and sympathy on a college campus — where women unfortunately face an *even greater* risk of sexual assault (Sampson, 2002) — than the safety and lives of the students there. Further, if women's issues cannot even

receive a fair hearing in activist spaces, or among other advocacy causes, the chances seem grim indeed that the mainstream culture will accurately assess and represent women's concerns.

Hannah highlights literal silencing by the mainstream culture during FORCE's work through Twitter with the Pink Loves Consent jam. Despite frequently congratulating themselves as an inspirational tool for revolutions in the Middle East, Twitter quickly blocked FORCE's account during the Pink Loves Consent jam, seeming less willing to acknowledge oppression when it was "close to home, both physically but also in terms of subject matter," or to support resistances which are "critiquing companies that might be or most likely do provide revenue for them" (HB18). That is, revolutions are all well and good... so long as they don't seek to topple inequalities that function economically and socially for us.

In addition to feeling that their issues were socially silenced, some participants also felt personally silenced, or a sense that "a lot of women don't have a voice" (RN14), be it politically or interpersonally. Hannah and Lillian both brought this issue up, though in interestingly different ways. For Lillian, she felt her transition to activism was in part, "an evolution though my life of trying to feel like I could speak" (LH11). Lillian was perhaps the most keenly attuned to feeling silenced in interpersonal environments, as well as aware of the stifling and inimical effects of that silencing, sharing:

"I found that one of the most difficult places to make change is at a dinner party; is in those conversations where you know the people, or maybe you don't know the person.... Maybe it's a street conversation or maybe it's just a party where there's a lot of people you don't know, and it's just conversation you hear, or become part of it. And [there's] something that somebody has said with very little thought. Or maybe with a lot of thought!... and I

choose not to act. I choose not to interrupt the dinner party, and don't say anything. And the statement that's been said is so offensive to me! And for me to let that go is damaging in itself, for me to remain silent." (LH17-18)

Hannah describes feels silenced in a different, more macro way in that she feels at points in her life she has simply been *unable* to speak, due to paralyzing interpersonal forces, but also due to a more totalizing discourse that strips away even the language to discuss certain things. She describes sexual encounters in her youth that felt ambiguous or potentially volatile, but lacking any language or framework to discuss her concerns and feelings. She remarks:

"I was actually talking to somebody really close to me recently about an experience that we had several years ago and revisiting it, and talking about it for the first time...we couldn't talk about it then because we didn't have the language to talk about it. We didn't have a platform." (HB38)

This ties into Sophie's comments about the discourse of "kiss me without asking" — without some structural means of support, or models, certain possibilities are rendered invisible and therefore, impossible. Without the language, the discourse, or the alternative models to use and point to, women are trapped within a system that has far from their best interests at heart — that uses them up for capitalist consumption, and then sets the rules of the game so that women lack the social empowerment or alternatives to resist, or to even talk about their suffering.

Using a well scaffolded cultural system of sexism that normalizes maltreatment of women, anything that might expose the widespread suffering of women is quickly re-categorized, swept

away, or folded into the discursive machine, creating cultural ignorance and conscripting every day citizens into participation in an ongoing lie: everything is all right here.

### *Inevitability and isolation*

*“Like ducks in this game” - Rebecca Nagle*

If women feel personally and politically silenced by a culture that ignores or actively erases women’s experiences of suffering, then this quite naturally ripples into other effects: namely feelings of hopelessness, inevitability, vulnerability, and isolation. The sense that oppression was *inevitable*, or at the very least perceived by the mainstream culture as “the natural order of things” (HB33) suffused the interviews.

Even though none of the women I spoke to personally felt it was true, they spoke of a mainstream attitude, and for some, even times in their own lives when it seemed there was “no end in sight” (SH40) to the violence against, and relegated status of, women in society. Participants described themselves and other women with words like “immobilized” (HB40); “overwhelmed” (LH9); “despondent” (RN8); and “paralyzed” (HB40). Conversely, cultural systems were described as, or thought to be perceived by others as: “impenetrable” (RN3) “insurmountable” (LH15); “pervasive” (RN8) and “all encompassing” (CB8).

Sophie describes growing up with a mother who worked in a domestic violence shelter and feeling “for a really, really long time, my whole life basically” that violence against women was always operating in the background as just “this *atroc*ity that’s happening” (SH40). She describes feeling baffled when her mother would come home on particularly tough nights saying, ““Sophie,

a lot of these guys didn't know they were doing anything wrong'" (SH41). This was understandably shocking to Sophie — "what are you *talking about*?! Like, they *raped* somebody!'" (SH41) — but calls attention to the way our society normalizes violence against women, such that perpetrators don't even realize that beating their wives or girlfriends is "wrong." In the face of such normalization, feelings of inevitability are a natural outgrowth and Sophie gradually began to feel like there was indeed, "no end in sight" (SH40): that violence against women is just part of being a woman, an assessment that, for now at least, she may be unfortunately correct about.

Lillian very astutely describes how such a move from atrocity to commonplace can occur — and the rippling effects it can have — using the metaphor of the body:

"The problem is so systemic that you don't even see it anymore. Like when we become so used to a little sore spot on our body and we just end up living with it and we kind of forget about it, and we then don't notice. But then our body starts to notice because another part of our body starts to ache, because we're walking crooked because of the first thing. We have become used to it." (LH27)

This acculturation is extremely dangerous, however, and it builds to ever increasing levels of violence and desensitization unless interrupted. Discussing why they chose to take up underwear as an issue, and produce consent themed underwear, Hannah remarks:

"It's not that I think necessarily that Victoria's Secret selling these underwear would solve all our problems. While at the same time, them selling underwear like "Sure Thing!" that

nobody critiques creates this situation where a lot can get ignored or it's harder and harder to be critical vocally. Because it's sort of like, it's everywhere, what are you going to do about it?" (HB11-12)

A sense of inevitability leads to inaction, despair, and desensitization, as people come to accept that the way things are is simply the way it must be, has always been, and therefore always will be. Hannah, Rebecca, and to some extent Sophie often framed this as "rape culture," with Hannah elaborating: "rape culture is all of the languages and the laws and the images that we see, the behaviors, the attitudes that make rape seem inevitable. We cease to recognize it as a thing that can be changed and we instead accept it as the state of things, the reality, the natural order of things." (HB32-33)

This inability to recognize the constructed nature of oppression against women — or gender at all — may be social in etiology, but it quickly infects individuals and has deeply personal effects. Rebecca describes:

"I think the way that sexual assault just feels inevitable... it can make you feel crestfallen, you know? ... it's like you feel despondent about the problem. And I think it's really easy to get there because it's so huge, it's so pervasive, it's been going on for so long.... these systems that create these situations are obviously deeply invested in regular people feeling like there's nothing that's ever going to change.... we're taught to think and feel that way." (RN9)

As Rebecca's comments illustrate, this sense of inevitability is not merely a byproduct or



coincidence, but a strategy, put in place by systems and in some cases actual corporations that stand to turn a social or fiscal profit off women's suffering and sense that there is no solution (besides, perhaps, buying the latest product). While creating a sense of inevitability may boost this season's sale of panties, keep the current electorate in place, or not trouble anyone's religious convictions about gender roles, it is deeply wounding to women, who often end up simply accepting a harmful set of ideals because they don't realize they have other options. Meghana points out that this feeling that things can never change is part of the obstacle to recruiting more women to help advocate for change:

“Honestly [some women] probably just don't want to think about all the terrible things that are going on around them that affect their daily lives in ways they wish they didn't. But they have to deal with them anyways so why complain? ... you have to deal with so much and sometimes it's easier to just be like 'Ok, ignorance is bliss, I'm just gonna do my work with my head down and try to deal with it in my own.'” (MK22-23)

This insight is particularly troublesome: if women accept that things simply are the way they are, not only are they suffering needlessly (since we know that issues of body distortion and sexual violence can and do vary across culture and time), they fail to take any action against the problem, or to rebel against a system that is actually not nearly as strong as it purports to be. Rebecca highlights that this hopelessness is precisely why it is so important to *act*, and to continue to deconstruct and defy the mainstream discourse of the inevitable. Both Rebecca and Hannah talked about the “myth of media” as all powerful and beyond the grasp of individuals, a myth tenuously held together — as all myths are — by belief: “I think culture jamming pokes holes in

what seem like impenetrable systems, which I think is just so important. It's so important to take on companies like Playboy and like Victoria's Secret that seem so powerful and unreachable." (RN3). As Rebecca points out, and FORCE's work actively demonstrates, it is not impossible to take these companies, or these discourses on, and the sense that such a thing is impossible is only evidence of the discourse itself, not fact.

Perhaps the most startling testament to the way in which women perceive violence and oppression as inevitable came in the form of an offhand comment from Meghana. When I asked if she felt advocacy work had helped her find a platform to speak, Meghana struggled to answer, finally replying: "I see myself as a very privileged person: I've dealt with things that I wish I hadn't, especially related to my gender, but I have *not* been sexually assaulted. Penetratively." She quickly followed up that it's just "overall sexism I deal with on a day to day basis" (MK26).

Though all my participants voiced their opinions in sophisticated and nuanced ways, it was this little interaction, full of breathe, and pause, and hesitancy, that broke my heart the most: what sort of culture is it where 21 year old women consider themselves "very privileged" to have not been raped? What kind of society is this if the *best* we can do for our women is *just* "overall sexism" that they experience *every day*? How have we come to be a place where young women count their luck (so far) at avoiding (penetrative) sexual assault?

Obviously if one feels rape, violence, or simply sexism are unavoidable facts of life, other work must be done — work checking over your shoulder, separating from anyone who might give you trouble, or, as Meghana noted, keeping your head down. Isolation was a major issue that all participants spoke to in one way or another, and the tendency to simply see one's struggles with sexist systems as personal failings, or flaws, without connecting them to a larger network, was frequently noted. Often participants cited that at some point in their lives or in the lives of women

they knew, a pervasive sense of inevitability kept them from even talking about their experiences with *each other*, thus keeping them walled off from any way to check if these same things were happening to others.

Caitlin comments: “I’ve talked to thousands of people and I hear over and over that people feel really alone in their issues. They feel like no one understands, and no one is in the position they’re in” (CB6). Rebecca similarly notes that “a lot of the fan mail we get is people who care about this issue and feel really isolated in caring about this issue” (RN9), a point Sophie drove home when she reported her surprise at discovering that, at a friend’s campus, they’re not even allowed to distribute condoms, saying “I literally have *no idea* what’s going on on other college campuses about this... it’s really hard to almost interact with other people” (SH38).

Without any peer support, community, or conceptual framework for working through the discourse of inevitable oppression of women, some participants — particularly the youngest participants — unsurprisingly felt a sense of constant vulnerability, that if they hadn’t yet, they would soon fall victim to actual violence. Sophie spoke to this perceived threat the most, commenting that “there’s this overwhelming sense that I *am* vulnerable [and] these feelings of vulnerability are something I interact with every day” (SH24). Meghana too spoke of the way that women in her local community “felt like they weren’t safe... like to walk home alone” (MK10) as just one — so common we cease to see it as problematic — example of the ways in which women internalize a sense of threat and modify their behavior accordingly. Sophie eloquently describes:

“The way I’ve explained it to my brother is ‘When you run on the bike trail, do you ever think, like ever, ever, *ever* think to look behind you? Do you *ever* feel like ‘Oh, I’m on the bike trail by myself, it’s twilight, *should* I be worried? *Should* I be worried? I don’t know!’

And he was like ‘no!’ [laughing] And I think that’s the *thing* is the fact that women internalize that fear. I’d be hard pressed to find a woman who doesn’t think about that almost every day... you’re *taught*, like on a very basic level when you’re walking down the street, look behind you to make sure nobody’s following you. To make sure that you’re not gonna get raped!” (SH21-22)

Sophie’s example points out not only how women feel uncertainty about their safety in various spaces — an uncertainty most men don’t feel — but how women feel uncertain even in their own assessments of *if* they are safe are not. Just as we find media objectification leads to an internalization of imagery and self-objectification, so does a constant sense that violence is just around the corner — coupled with actual experiences of daily sexism at all levels of society — move inside women, infecting them and causing them to doubt their own perceptions.

After all, the decisions women make about their own safety have serious consequences, and they are made against a backdrop of victim blaming in mainstream discourse, media, and court systems, as well as thorough erasure of women’s suffering. Sophie’s comments emphasize the weight women carry with them as a part of daily existence: women are called upon to make unfathomably consequential decisions, and they know that should they ‘choose wrong,’ no one will hear them scream.

While such a statement might seem provocative, it is unfortunately simply accurate — it is not just a matter of discourse and media that make rape seem inevitable; actual legal consequences are slim, with approximately 1% of sexual assaults resulting in imprisonment of an offender and resultantly, most victims feeling that “the formal social mechanisms of justice [are] closed to them” (Herman, 1997, p. 73).

Between traditional legal statutes for rape that dictate a level of violence and coercion “which far exceeds that usually needed to terrorize a woman,” and a court and prosecution system which is “often frankly hostile to rape victims,” (Herman, 1997, p. 72) women quickly realize that even actual and physical violence is not likely to be heard, or stopped. Thus legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon (1983) is not wrong when she writes that “rape, from a woman’s perspective, is not prohibited; it is regulated” (p. 651).

On rape, Judith Herman (1997) devastatingly writes: “the most common trauma of women remains confined to the sphere of private life, without recognition or restitution from the community” (p. 73). As my participants detailed, the erasure of women’s suffering through this ‘privacy’ only adds to the communal ignorance, and ultimately builds a resultant sense of inevitability.

Women every day make decisions about what they can say, and to whom, what spaces they can enter, at what times, and with whom, *knowing* that if violence comes upon them — as it has to so many of their friends, sisters, mothers, and relatives — *they* will be the ones held responsible. Their behavior, their decisions, and their dress will all be factored into why they were victimized, which raises the cognitive stakes for women simply trying to go about their lives impossibly high.

Where will the energy to inspire, to change society, to create, to invent, to lead, or to move ahead come from if women are always looking over their shoulders, or keeping their heads down? And why do we continue to simply tell women to buck up, get braver, or be stronger, rather than investigating, and properly situating blame with, a society that redirects their work into managing the obstacles placed in front of — and all around — them? Women make up more than half of our society; we are poorer indeed to lose so much from so many, who divert their creativity and skills into navigating impossible expectations and battling for basic rights.

It is precisely this extra work, less able to be captured under a thematic heading or highlighted with a poignant quote, that seemed most at play in the emotional exhaustion and everyday suffering of the women I interviewed, and that seems the most compelling evidence for a cultural sickness. When analyzing and collecting quotes I found myself sticking many notes and lines under a bullet point for which I could think of no better title for than: “a gradual accumulation of bullshit.” While inelegant, this still perhaps best captures what I heard from my participants in terms of women’s suffering. That whether it is caused by an auger or a million droplets of water, a hole is still a *hole*. Sadly, the face of our society is riveted with such cracks and fissures, formed by ‘ordinary’ incidents, each one grinding and grating ever so slightly against a woman’s sense of worth, her sense of beauty, her sense of trust; her sense of safety.

In the face of a society that refuses to acknowledge their experience, women are tasked with a thousand extra burdens. To work harder, to work smarter. To be loud. To be not so loud that people think you’re a bitch. To try and convince people of your worth, to try and get men to care, to try and get men to stop being violent. To protect ourselves, to reach out from isolation, to overcome spaces in which we are silenced, to fight to be recognized, to fight to be paid, to fight to be heard, to fight, and fight... and fight. It is everywhere we look, and it demands so much from us.

As I will unfold more directly in the following chapter, we as clinicians and psychologists must take care not to participate in the silencing that the women I spoke with elaborated, and to situate the problem where it properly belongs. Feelings of exhaustion, vulnerability, helplessness, silencing, and erasure find natural translation as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders, and though it is tempting to treat these symptoms, we must look deeper to find their causes. We cannot take the unique ways and differential rates at which these diagnoses effect women and the pervasive experiences with sexism women face as coincidence. Rather, we must revise our

understanding of who — or what — exactly is sick here, and therefore what will be required to heal.

## ***Healing***

*“You know with No Justice, No Peace...*

*I guess you might say it’s fairly simple.*

*But to me, it’s pretty, um*

*Not complex*

*But then again it’s deep,*

*It’s nothin’ shallow.*

*It basically means if there’s no justice here*

*Then we not gonna give them any peace.”*

*- P. Parker, community activist (cited in Herman, 1997, p. 244)*

The portrait painted in the previous section is, admittedly, bleak. And I must also confess that at points during its writing I felt pangs of guilt and hesitancy, my fingers pausing across the keyboard. There is a fine line to be drawn between attempting to truly capture and present the myriad of ways in which society works to subtly devalue, discriminate against, and render women less-than, and *actually* presenting women as helpless, powerless victims, trapped in an unjust system with no agency. In fact, it is the ticklish and triumphant concept of agency that lies at the very heart of this research.

While I do believe, very strongly, that society grinds against and works tirelessly to chip

away at the agency of women — and, of course, many other marginalized populations — it is neither my belief nor my intent to portray these efforts as entirely successful. Indeed, this research is founded on their failing, and on the notion that they *might* fail ever more completely the more we as citizens begin to choose to fight back. For as indestructible and insurmountable as the machinations of media and culture may present themselves, they are paltry compared to the strength and ingenuity of the women I interviewed, and to the capacities I believe women possess. It is not a question of inability, merely of finding ways to properly empower women and channel their capacities as means for resistance and proliferation of the new.

This section focuses on just such empowerment and resistance, and turns from suffering, not to erase it, but to see what can be done with it, what my participants *did* do with it, and ultimately, how we as psychologists can help. Without denying the value of simply exploring pathology and pain, a firm belief in, and detailed understanding of, the ways in which individual suffering and cultural forces are inextricable need not preclude acting, but should serve as a call to action.

If indeed it is true that our society is systematically objectifying and violating women, then we must take these truths seriously, and we must do all we can to abate this violence and render vulnerable the damaging cultural myths that present themselves as truths. Thus I asked my participants not only about how they saw sexism in our culture, or the ways in which women suffered because of social inequality, but also how we might begin to heal and change.

What does society need to begin treating this pervasive patriarchal disease? What do women need in order to heal from the effects of living in this culture personally, psychologically, and culturally? What helps people heal from these experiences, both conceptually and in terms of specific therapeutic practices? This section is divided into two subsections, the first outlining the



general principles that my participants felt will be, or have been, helpful in terms of combating cultural sexism and its effects on women, and the second looking at specific tools for healing.

Introducing the core concept of this dissertation — culture jamming — I will outline how it takes up the outlined principles of healing, as well as how jamming compares against a few other potential cultural therapeutics, such as feminism, art, and education. The role of therapy as an individual and cultural therapeutic will be left to the next and final chapter, where I will present these findings in the context of clinical and philosophical psychology, drawing comparisons to our current conceptions and treatment protocols for trauma as well as to key cultural thinkers in order to make sense of and suggest how we as psychologists are moved to respond to these findings.

### *Conceptual elements of healing*

### *Public awareness and a change in discourse*

*“It has to be something that’s part of our language” - Sophie Hess*

As I sorted through my readings and analyses on healing, a number of themes arose that were linked — and oppositional — to the categories of suffering outlined in the previous section. In particular, participants spoke strongly, unanimously, and frequently about a need for a change in the public discourse, and for women to feel safe and free to speak, and be listened to, about their experiences and opinions. Instead of feeling silenced, disconnected, and isolated, our culture needs to shift to women “feeling free to critique the culture that they live in and then propose what they would like for their culture to look like” (HB48). At the very least, women need to have more

power and control over the messages that are being spread about women, as Rebecca notes: “the dominant narrative is going to be the narrative that *we* create - I think that’s key” (RN22).

A general kind of consciousness raising was identified as a crucial beginning point to ending the problem of sexism and its effects on women — as Hannah says, “there’s two streams of work, one where we’re naming the problem, and, and still trying to get the problem recognized... and then on the other hand proposing this alternative” (HB36). Because the erasure of women’s suffering *is* so systemic, participants spoke frequently to a continual need to simply help end silence and take women seriously, as well as create “public healing space[s]” (HB7) that foster a sense of community responsibility.

Part of what seemed the most hurtful and egregious in the accounts of my participants is a sense that not *only* are things so unfair and not *only* do they have to work so hard, but on top of it, women are constantly told to just work harder, or that any failing is their own responsibility, without any understanding of the broader cultural inequalities and forces at play (silencing).

On the other hand, participants also felt that once a critical shift in consciousness occurs, then “it’ll happen very quickly” (MK30) and major changes can, and will be made. As Hannah put it: “as soon as the cultural consciousness shifts to ‘that shit’s fucked up and we can do something about it’ that’s when you see significant, substantial, historic changes occur ...there’s a tipping point that happens once enough people are rallying together” (HB511)

Critical to raising conscious in many participant accounts was a need to literally be out in public — to have “places for people to get together and have community” and “platforms for the conversations to happen” (HB37) that will spread public awareness of sexism and the difficulties that women face. Hannah and Rebecca spoke particularly strongly to the need for public recognition and reconciliation — unsurprising given their current project building a monument to

survivors of rape. Hannah remarks “it is a *community* responsibility, it’s not the responsibility of survivors to fix themselves” and Rebecca echoes:

“There almost needs to be like the flood gates open up and we have this moment of truth and reconciliation about what sexual violence is and how common it is and how tragic. There needs to just be a lot of pain that comes out... because it’s unbearable. It’s unspeakable. These acts of violence are unbearable and unspeakable and they just break what we think our society is. It just breaks everything. You look at it on a family level, it breaks everything that you thought your family was when this happens in your family, you know? When it happens in your church, it crumbles everything you thought your church was. When it happens in your football team, it crumbles everything. How you experience that, how you think about it, how you celebrate it; it just breaks everything down to see this violence existing in all these places. So I think we have to go through that process, the family, the church, and the country.” (RN21)

Lillian points out that this publicly speaking and being listened to is not just a beneficial first step to change, but is also in itself a healing measure. She particularly tied public healing and sharing to the concept of witnessing, common in the Quaker community:

“If there is say a conflict in Nicaragua, you are doing something by going out to Nicaragua and just being there and witnessing. And I think this is also true if you take something, just some passage in one’s own small circle where everyone lives and you witness something. And maybe it’s just on the street, maybe it’s... a more personal level of somebody’s

suffering. The act of witnessing I feel is empowering and makes a difference to the person who is suffering.” (LH10-11)

Given how abundantly my participants seemed to suffer because of silencing and erasing — a kind of crazy making where one’s experience is fundamentally denied — just the act of seeing their suffering witnessed and acknowledged, rather than shoved aside, justified, laughed off, or reacted to, was cited as a therapeutic act in itself. Pivotal across my participants’ accounts was a need to step out of the shadows, and to have the messages that they want out in the culture, speaking with equal volume as the mainstream discourse, and returning power and public attention to the struggles of women.

### Connection and sharing

*“I think just connecting to others is therapeutic” - Lillian Hsu*

Themes of connection and sharing were strikingly prominent across participant accounts, and connecting — with actual other people, to a larger community, or to a movement or ideology — was unanimously emphasized as a critical component of healing. Lillian notes that “connecting to other people can have a lot of power” (LH23) and Caitlin highlights how connection with other people has been a huge part of the Operation Beautiful project for both her and others:

“I love getting to connect to people and hear their stories, I love that a lot... there’s a lot of healing on the Operation Beautiful website about people connecting through the notes or

through the comments, connecting about their struggles and their solutions, and it's really inspiring to see. Part of getting better is reaching out the other people and I love when that can happen.” (CB5)

Indeed, Hannah, Rebecca, and Caitlin all cite wanting to connect with others or reach out to a great number of people as central motivating factors for them in beginning their creative activism. Caitlin comments that before beginning her work, “I was really lonely” (CB5) and Lillian notes that BJTWYA was “so fulfilling” (LH13) because she felt connected to the women who found her work. This connection was a key factor for many of the participants in doing the work, and in why they enjoyed it.

Meghana notes a positive connection with an audience member “makes everything worthwhile” (MK25) and Lillian describes that people finding BJTWYA posters “continue to contact me” and that “the stories that came out of those, even when it was just a couple sentences [were] *soooo* moving. It made me both sad and hopeful; enthusiastic about it, feeling very connected to the women who I don't know” (LH6). These individual interactions seemed to inspire hope in my participants, and to help them feel less isolated in their experiences, as well as their concerns about their experiences.

Hannah points out that “reconnection with community [is] essential for people to heal from trauma” (HB32) and Rebecca echoes that the people who heal the best from trauma are “people who are connected to something bigger than themselves” (RN7). Caitlin also felt that “being a part of the movement... knowing they are part of that connection is important for people” (CB6) and that “it's amazing to be a part of something” (CB8).

These comments hint at how connection to a larger community, or a sense of being

included and valued in society is as important to individual and cultural healing as connection with actual individual others. While connecting with individual others can help one to feel less lonely and isolated, being folded into a community has an additional empowering effect, as one feels like a recognized and important member of a whole, feeling not only less alone, but actively included and a part of something.

Subtly different, though obviously related to the notion of connecting was that of sharing, particularly sharing stories, strategies, and tactics. Lillian notes that Beautiful Just The Way You Are came about for her because she felt so *upset*: “I had to get something out of my body. I feel that’s important when we have something that’s really churning and troubling us inside, it helps to literally get it out of our body” (LH2). This points to how expressing pain, and sharing one’s own experiences with suffering, is in itself a significant ameliorative — an insight therapists know well. The churning out that Lillian is able to accomplish through BJTWYA is different than that of therapy, however, because it is shared not only with others, but *by* others, who then reciprocate with connection.

Rebecca felt she had a history in her artwork of “giving people a voice” (RN16), and that FORCE’s work now centers around “creating platforms for other people’s voices and for people who have been silenced” (RN14) to share their stories and have the opportunity to connect with each other. Again connecting back to silencing and isolation, Hannah and Rebecca felt strongly that having spaces for women to share the reality of their experiences — preferably public spaces — is paramount. It seems fitting that as an artist, Hannah identifies as “a maker, a quilter” (HB4-5) and that her work as an activist too involves stitching together the stories of women and bringing together voices as a healing and therapeutic action. Rebecca describes FORCE’s current work as:

“a really tangible way where people can engage in the healing process where they’re also connected to something that’s political and *larger*. I think there is something about scale too because I think that it’s hard to lose control and have a really different kind of experience. And so I think re-empowerment is a really important process of healing.”  
(RN8)

As Rebecca’s comments illustrate, reconnection and reintegration with the community is vital to individual healing, but it is also essential for cultural healing. In order to change the discourse and create a different public awareness, women must feel free and able to speak as valuable members of the community. This means removing blame, stigma, and mystery from “women’s issues” and empowering women to reconnect with their bodies, their community, and their fellow citizens. While we work to end patriarchal inequalities, greater connection will also allow women to “share our tactics” (RN3) and strategies for combating everyday sexism.

#### *Taking action and effectively helping others*

*“There’s nothing more empowering than creating a lot of radical change, you know?” -  
Rebecca Nagle*

Often participants voiced that it was not just connecting to others, but taking action and, specifically, feeling like they were helping others that was so rewarding and therapeutic for them in their culture jamming work. Meghana notes that having a way to actually work against sexism through her campus involvement with SAPAC “provides me with some kind of outlet for the anger

and frustration that I feel on a day to day basis” (MK26) and Hannah comments that people “want to feel like they’re being effective in some way... they want to know that that presence *matters* in some way” (HB38).

Talk was often seen as insufficient – pointing to a potential limitation of the traditional therapy framework – and participants felt a pull to *do something* in order to help overcome the pain and general emotional exhaustion they felt subjected to on a daily basis. Not only did action provide my participants with some personal relief by feeling actively engaged, participants were also able to feel that they were helping more generally to stop the problem overall and contributing to a better landscape for themselves as well as other women.

Hannah, one of the participants more reticent to discuss her personal experiences, remarks, “I can only have the conversation by doing the work” (HB38) and that for her, “doing the work” is how she’s able to process her own experiences and trauma. Crucially, Hannah feels that women being able to speak up and share overwhelming experiences is:

“not only about giving language, because I think that at the point that I had language to talk about, if I didn’t have anything to do about it, *I still wouldn’t have talked about it*. And I think a lot of people feel that way... [they] don’t want to talk about it if there’s not going to be something that can be done” (HB48).

In terms of therapy, Hannah’s comments are particularly salient to keep in mind. If other women feel, as Hannah does, that there’s really no point or healing to come of talk without action, then this is an incisive critique of the practice of therapy and its capacity to help women heal. Rebecca notes that much of her early artwork centered around her own trauma, describing:



“I had to go through a process of telling my own story and working through my stuff; giving shape and forms to things in a way that I think was actually more accessible to me than just being like ‘this is what happened’ you know? To write a play... to mask it and put layers on it and giving it an aesthetic” (RN15)

Both Rebecca and Hannah’s comments demonstrate how, for them, taking active steps and feeling engaged in some action was of the utmost importance in healing. They also point to the way that action enabled them to feel able to then speak, and to then use the more traditional therapeutic tools of straightforward story telling and verbal connection.

This healing comes about partly because taking action provides the incredibly valuable opportunity to actually *affect change*: to see a law shift, someone’s mind change, or a positive news report, and to feel that one is therefore *capable* of affecting change. This in turns helps to combat the sense of inevitability that so many women feel, and the despairing sense that things won’t or can’t ever change.

Rebecca notes that “when you feel *effective*, I think that feels really empowering” (RN8) and that “a personal sense of efficacy is really important for people” (RN9). For women in a landscape of commodification and objectification, where their agency is routinely stripped from them, their choices limited, and their very bodies distorted out from under them, being able to take charge of messages and feel able to actually accomplish goals is an empowering and important experience.

Hannah points to a need to deconstruct a “myth that the world is the way it is and you have to accept that” (HB51) and emphasizes that “if people don’t think they can have any kind of impact

then they're not going to get involved in the first place" (HB52). Meghana echoed this, saying, "I think it's important to educate people about the prevalence of [sexual assault] and the effect that it has on survivors... but *also* how they can change it" (MK5).

Hannah described her journey working with FORCE as one where "I didn't even realize how small I was thinking" (HB43) and how "all of the things that I've always felt about change are realistic. Like that kind of change can actually happen... it is really empowering" (HB44). Hannah comments further that: "I think it helps when people find out how small FORCE is, because we *do* make a big impact, but it's really a couple of people" (HB12).

This surprise at how much effect one can realistically have was common to several participants, especially Sophie, Hannah, and Caitlin. This is understandable given the deep economic and social investment our culture has in maintaining the power structure as is: in order to keep up the status quo, people must believe that there isn't a realistic way for it to be otherwise. It was often surprising, then, for my participants when they actually took action and found change is much more possible than they thought, or were led to believe.

Sophie engagingly describes how her participation in the Playboy jam led to surprising results, for her and for others: "we constantly are complaining about these problems as though they're going to keep persisting and we have no control over them and for this one day it was like – oh! That was so *fucking easy*! We just went on *Facebook*, you know? It wasn't hard!" (SH46). As Sophie's example illustrates, being actively engaged provided an empowering and in some ways corrective experience for her, and has motivated her to continue her advocacy work. This, in turn, can only have broader and more beneficial cultural effects.

The notion of advocacy, or acting on behalf of and helping others, was often an important facet of the actions that participants chose to take. That is, their specific projects were often

motivated by a desire to help others, or they found that one of the most fruitful benefits of the project was a sense of helping and empowering others through their work. Lillian notes that before the project, “I don’t think I spent a lot of time thinking about the person who would find it” (LH15) but that as she began to receive responses from people it was “so fulfilling” because “I felt I had done something for them. It was such a small thing... and I felt very good about that, so that’s therapeutic for me.” (LH13)

Caitlin, on the other hand, comments that thinking about the person who would find the post-it was a crucial motivator for her to actually take out the pen and write a note, as opposed to remaining where she was, crying. She describes, “I was feeling that when I left the first note and intrinsically understood it was creating a chain reaction of niceness” (CB6). Meghana too notes that “advocating for those people who aren’t sometimes able to advocate for themselves, talking to them, hearing their stories, then kind of distributing those messages to a broader audience *is* a part of it for me” (MK26).

With regards to sexual assault victims, Hannah also states directly that in her reading and experience, “the survivors that have had the best process of healing have been the ones that become advocates” (HB39), strongly underscoring how acting on behalf of others has some historically recognized therapeutic value. Rebecca shared a deeply personal connection to this truth, describing a moment of feeling the weight of how her actions were impacting others:

“I was driving in my truck and this Weezer song came on, and I listened to Weezer a lot when I was in high school and there was this one specific phase and it took me back there. And I remember how I had like no access. No one was talking to me about sexual violence, no one was talking to me about healthy sexuality, I had no idea. And it took me until I was

in college to start getting real information about that stuff! And then I was thinking about other 15 year olds who are finding this information through our culture jam and how their experience might be different than mine, and I just started crying... to *feel* like making that difference.” (RN13)

Especially for women, who are often socialized to act for the communal, rather than individual good (Gilligan, 1982), it is worth seriously considering how working to help heal other women might be an important first step for many women in their own healing. Caitlin in particular highlighted how it was difficult for her to say or do nice things for herself, but easy (or at least, easier) to do them for others — and incidentally helpful for her too.

Part of the very etiology of Operation Beautiful is premised upon acting for others when one can’t act for oneself, as Caitlin took a moment when she felt “stupid” “worthless” and like a “failure” (CB2) — crying in a bathroom stall after failing a test — and transformed it into a positive experience, *for someone else*, writing “you are beautiful” on a post-it note and sticking it on a public mirror. She comments: “I don’t know why I wrote ‘you are beautiful.’ I mean I do, I felt not beautiful, not strong and confident and capable, which is what I think beautiful means. But I don’t know why I did it really.” (CB2)

Here we can see that Caitlin took her own painful experience, which she could not yet share or psychically transform, and used it to positively impact another person. Interestingly, she also explains that she chose to tell another person she was beautiful precisely *because* it is not what she felt about herself. This interpersonal and externalizing transformation is a fascinating one, and may be especially important if we consider how women may act on each others’ behalves, but to their own benefit.

Caitlin notes that she still leaves Operation Beautiful notes every day and that “when I’m not feeling my best it’s always good for me to get outside my issues and beyond myself and do something nice for somebody else” (CB7). Interestingly, she also comments that “I think a lot of people write [Operation Beautiful notes] and are writing them for other people, but they write them enough and they realize the messages apply to them as well” (CB6), suggesting that just as media has a negative internalizing effect, so can creative activism have a positive internalizing effect.

### Alternative images and models

*“Our work captures the public imagination, and I think that’s a kind of therapy: being able to help people imagine a different way that things could be.” - Hannah Brancato*

Given that harmful and hegemonic discourse about women, proliferated through the media, was identified as a major source of suffering, it is unsurprising that creating alternative media, messages, and models for women and girls was an oft cited path towards individual and cultural healing. Sophie notes that, “who you’re seeing and who you’re looking up to” is “so powerful” (SH18-19) and that having “sustainable media” that “people can continuously look to” (SH35) for alternative messages and role models is crucial, particularly for girls.

Caitlin also comments that the alternative views that Operation Beautiful provides for people can make them feel “relieved” because “they feel like the world is such a terrible place” (CB6). By providing an atypical message to girls — you are beautiful — and by modeling a different way that girls could interact with each other and the media — by empowering rather than criticizing each other and creating their own messages rather than passively receiving messages —

Operation Beautiful provides a sense of relief and possibility to those who find notes.

Although participants felt strongly that the damaging effects of our current system are still under-recognized, participants were cautious about simply being critical. Hannah remarks, “I do think we should be offering *solutions*” (HB48) and stresses people need more than criticism in order to feel as though there *is* some possibility to even work towards. Meghana shared this sentiment, saying: “I like complaining about things as much as the next person,” but without “providing a viable solution” (MK21) people will not be mobilized to action. Hannah and Meghana’s comments work together with the previously outlined need for action to underscore how striving to provide a greater diversity of options for how our society *might be* is a significant step in healing our culture, and the individual women who live in it.

Sophie notes that growing up, “just seeing beauty that was quirky” (SH18) or girls who were not perfect, or all exactly the same, was a powerful and transformative experience for her. Lillian echoed this, saying: “we need to have women of all kinds up there in power... it’s not we need to be this model... we need to get to a point where there’s just the same spectrum as in any other population – which of course there is!” (LH35). Part of the frustration my participants felt was not simply that the messages disseminated about women were damaging, but that there was such a paucity of models available. Sophie and Lillian especially highlighted how a much greater range of representation and possibilities is needed for women to make greater cultural strides.

Caitlin describes how having alternative messages can have a rippling impact throughout the environment in addition to an individual impact:

“Many adults say ‘how can we change the media?’ The answer is you’re never going to change the media, you’re not. But how do you create an alternative message? I think

Operation Beautiful certainly has the power to create an alternative message in the micro environments it is in. There are a lot of Operation Beautiful clubs and some have hundreds of members and Operation Beautiful is just a normal part of that school. So there's notes all over the mirrors and all over the bathrooms, and kids say there's less bullying and people are nicer." (CB8)

As Caitlin points out, knowing there is another way not only gives hope to individuals, but that hope spreads through the milieu — much in the same way that despair can so easily pervade a milieu — and can have transformative effects throughout. Hannah and Rebecca particularly emphasized how providing alternatives helps people to see some possibility for change and to stave off the sense of inevitability that can be so detrimental to our society. Rebecca specifically spoke of the importance of rendering seemingly impenetrable systems vulnerable:

"It's *possible*. We know that it's possible. And there are also these really clear things that are keeping us where we are. So imagining those cultural changes and showing the ways that that kind of shift is possible – it gives people something tangible to imagine instead of feeling like ducks in this game.... it's important for people to have those moments ... for people to experience that it makes sense. It makes more sense than the world we're living in and so why not? I think it builds up people's sense that it can happen, you know?"

(RN8-9)

As Rebecca's comments illustrate, having an alternative image or model to point to builds a sense of possibility and in turn, personal efficacy, which then further inspires action, connection,

and resultant public awareness leading to change. Again, we see links between each of these concepts of healing and ways in which they relate and feed into each other, as well as react against the already outlined components of social suffering. In the next section, I will attempt to concretize these concepts and demonstrate how culture jamming creatively employs these healing principles where other forms of cultural therapeutics may be limited. Further, I will demonstrate how creative activism contains unique additional features that may be of further help to women, and to our culture, in moving towards greater freedom.

### *Cultural therapeutics*

Each society has a different history, but ours is one particularly rife with, indeed founded upon, resistance and protest. Our nation was born from revolt, and we have an established tradition of ways in which we attempt to change, or heal, our culture: from research and politics to riots and protests. Defining a cultural therapeutic as that which helps a culture to be more free — one in which more voices can be heard, more choices are open as valid, and more awareness comes to the fore — this section explores just a few of our society's traditional cultural therapeutics.

Understanding that change takes many different streams of work flowing together, this section attempts to illustrate some of the ways in which current means for effecting cultural change are necessary but insufficient, as well as suggest how culture jamming and creative activism may help fill in these holes, or act as an important adjunctive.



*Cultural therapeutics: Art, protest, education, and feminism*

All of my participants were quick to note that culture jamming and creative activism are not cure alls and that social change is “something that is done collectively and in many, many different places” (LH15). All participants also acknowledged that it takes “lots of different tactics” (HB51) and “a lot of time” (HB52) for a society to change, and that much will be needed to overturn historical inequalities, and put in place newer and freer versions of culture.

This need for a plurality of efforts was recognized verbally in my participants’ accounts, but also shows up in the diverse kinds of work that they do or have done through their lives — usually a blend of education, art, activism, or other ventures in advocacy and social change. Interestingly, the need for diversity is modeled in the very structure of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, where Meghana works, which has three distinct arms: one focusing on survivor awareness and safe spaces, one specializing in education and workshops for incoming freshmen, and Meghana’s branch, which targets men’s activism.

Idiosyncratically, participants also cited a broad spectrum of specific cultural therapeutics that they felt were necessary, or would be helpful to creating change. Both Caitlin and Lillian felt that positive modeling by teachers and parents is crucial to long term social transformation, stating that “it has to start at home” (CB5) and noting how “people who grow up with mothers who were truly out there with their full strength and character, that makes a difference” (LH45).

Meghana felt that endorsement by mainstream corporations would ultimately need to happen in order for large scale change to follow, commenting: “it’s going to take real companies, not fake Playboy” to get behind concepts like consent and equality and make them ‘cool’ in order to truly revolutionize culture. Hannah drew attention to “protocols like how sexual assault is

handled” and “Title IX” (HB50) as important policy work that needs to be continued, particularly for and by young women.

Both Lillian and Meghana emphasized the importance of “the little conversations between people” (MK12) and how change comes about through “an accumulation of all those moments” (LH19). In their view, one on one interactions can have a powerful, cumulative effect – for better or worse. The diverse tools of family, economics, politics, and interpersonal interactions form an important backdrop to discussing the specific therapeutics that I chose to ask participants about or that tended to dominate our conversation – art, activism, education, and feminism.

### Art

Given that several of my participants — Lillian, Rebecca, and Hannah — are, or were, working artists before their activism, it is perhaps unsurprising that art was identified by these participants as a means to achieving cultural and personal healing. Rebecca and Hannah note that their first work together as FORCE was an art exhibit called *Force on the Culture of Rape*, which debuted in conjunction with a satirical play Rebecca had written about incest. Rebecca comments that the exhibition was successful in that “we found people in our community having more honest conversations about this issue” (RN1) but that at the same time, she and Hannah both were disappointed that it gathered only “a very local specific audience” (HB6) for those conversations.

Rebecca comments that this disappointment stood out to her and Hannah as a fundamental “disconnect” between medium and goals: “we know that we want to reach college students, but how many college students learn how to have sex and intimate relationships from a freaking art exhibit?” (RN2). Lillian too felt that her work as an artist was limited in terms of reach and

audience. She identified one of the benefits of culture jamming as transcending boundaries, noting that: “if I make an artwork about [inequality, sexism], and I have done that and lots of people do very effectively, but it’s only then the people who are going to go see your art” (LH21).

In the case of all three artist participants, art was seen as a valuable means for expressing pain, and for sharing one’s stories, but was insufficient to necessarily connect with a broader community or attain the kind of volume and public recognition that participants felt is ultimately needed to address the problem. While their artwork was able to help in some of the ways outlined in the previous section — allowing participants to *do* something, and to share their experiences — the range of audience was simply too small for it to make the difference that my participants wanted, either for themselves or for the culture.

Even with very public works of art – like those of Barbara Kruger, or Jenny Holzer reviewed in the Literature Review – the pieces are usually displayed publicly for awhile and then put back into a museum on permanent collection. While art provides an aesthetic history for culture jamming and holds on to a historical trace in ways that the trendy new practices of creative activism may not be able to, the audience is a seriously limiting factor. This theme of audience is a recurrent one, and one of the major advantages of a culture jamming approach, as we will soon see.

### **Protest**

Protest and traditional activism — tools precisely engineered for amassing numbers and generating public awareness — were also brought up by participants as effective, but limited measures. Rebecca affirms the value of the work of feminist activists historically, saying: “people don’t realize that there wasn’t a single rape crisis center in the U.S. prior to 1971, and that wasn’t

the government getting together and saying ‘oh we should really fund these’... it was actually grassroots feminists starting those” (RN4). However, some participants, particularly the younger participants, were wary of how effective traditional protest really is, or if the unintended side effects of protest are worth it.

Take Back the Night, an annual rally for survivors of sexual assault to speak out about their experiences, was referenced by both Sophie and Meghana with much ambivalence. Both women clearly felt torn, endorsing this historical event and describing it as “powerful” (SH30) and “what should be done” (MK16). At the same time, they also felt that Take Back the Night is “exclusive” (MK16) and “really alienating” (SH30). While protest may generate more volume than art, or individual interactions, it was still criticized by participants as not really reaching a large enough audience, or being limited in impact. Meghana and Sophie felt that protests and rallies were “really negative” (MK14) and that the packaging is too aggressive for most people, who find them uncomfortable.

Particularly because most major public displays working with women’s issues would go under the label of feminism, participants felt many people are hesitant to attend protest marches or rallies (a point which will receive more exploration in the following section on feminism) and thus most protest measures simply “preach to the choir” (HB9). Too often, a felt pressure to adopt a label or have a certain ideological background keeps people away from rallies and protests, to the point that when I asked about these measures, Caitlin laughed, responding, “if I was organizing an event I would never say ‘oh feminist rally!’... overwhelmingly people would have a negative reaction” (CB4).

Hence while marches, rallies, and protests may provide valuable healing spaces and places for women to connect to a larger community and share their stories, many participants felt they

were not inclusive enough to actually effect mainstream attitudes. Though these events obviously take place in public, my participants described how the protest space essentially constitutes a private sector within the public sphere, and thus does not really interface with the public in the same way as jamming. Perhaps even more dangerously, events like these may have the unintended effect of making it seem like the problem is taken care of — we’ve got National Women’s Day and Take Back the Night every year, what more do you want? — while effectively simply ghettoizing it.

That is, women no longer feel able to complain about sexism since there are spaces in which they can — and therefore *should* — be doing so. However, my participants pointed out that these spaces may only be attended by other like minded women, meaning complaints are never heard by those with more power to change them. Further, protest *was* equated with complaint, rather than action, by many of my participants, and complaint often felt insufficient to them, as already explored. While the experience of discovering a like minded community was important, participants generally did not really feel that protest necessarily changes people’s minds, or leads to lasting social change in and of itself.

### **Education**

Education was identified as a strong component of individual and cultural healing for the participants, and all participants worked as educators in some way. Meghana and Sophie both run educational programming on their local campuses, while Hannah, Rebecca, and Caitlin tour the nation doing workshops related to consent and positive body image, and Lillian has worked formally in classrooms throughout her career. All participants voiced some version of Sophie’s

sentiment that “education is *really* important, and I don’t think we can get around it” (SH58) and all stressed the need for community and institutional spaces to educate people about women’s struggles, as well as how to participate in making a difference. Hannah notes that culture jamming may target an issue and temporarily garner lots of attention for it, but:

“We need to also be doing education and we need to be deconstructing where attitudes are coming from, we need to think about interlocking oppression, we can’t think about sexism in an isolated way. We have to think about racism, we have to think about the way that our class system plays into the power dynamics that are involved in sexism.” (HB50)

With education, however, participants felt the same hampering pinches as they did in the realms of art and protest — education simply doesn’t reach enough people, doesn’t do it fast enough, or doesn’t do it diversely or effectively enough. Meghana comments that “there’s only so much individuals can *do* in terms of educating each other” (MK11), pointing to the ways in which the educational platform itself is restricted in terms of scale. Not only is size limited within the walls of a classroom, but many people who may need alternative messages or education may never set foot in a university, or workshop.

Thus while education was universally seen as important, the audience is small and already filtered in many ways, some of which may mimic historical exclusions along the lines of class and race. In addition to audience exclusion, the criticism of ideological exclusion was raised again — as with protests, some participants worried that workshops convey a message of “this is the *right* way to think about this” (MK11) which limits diverse opinions, as well as making it difficult to apply to one’s personal life and experience. Sophie describes her frustration attending a dance

party that was the culmination of Safer Sex week at Oberlin, saying:

“We made all of our workshops [with] like a really, really heavy emphasis on consent and communication and respect for partners, and then you get to this event and it’s all about drinking and hooking up with people! ... I wonder how far people can internalize these things that we’re doing. We’re like ‘let’s talk about consent,’ we make these ‘zines, we talk about it in all of our workshops, and then how does that actually translate into the real world where then we’re just watching people be really drunk?” (SH4)

In all of these historical means for accomplishing cultural transformation — art, protest, and education — similar concerns were echoed. How can people take the concepts from those specific, bound contexts and translate them back into their real lives? How many people will even hear messages in those spaces in the first place, and won’t the people who come to the classroom, rally, or art exhibit *already* have some level of sympathy for the ideas? How far can these measures go, and how long will it take for them to trickle down into the everyday experiences of women?

### **Feminism**

But then, we forget — there is already a tool, a cultural therapeutic, devised specifically to address women’s concerns and activate cultural change for sexual equality. We’ve done this all before, haven’t we? Indeed feminism, as an ideology, rhetoric, and cultural movement, is supposed to be the prescription for a culture sick with patriarchy. Again, I am reminded of my own experience, and of the event that instigated this research in the aisles of the grocery store. I was so

shocked to find myself moved to tears by the Beautiful Just The Way You Are poster mostly because I already strongly identified as a feminist.

I already knew what Lillian was talking about when she writes in the explanatory text about “media objectification” and omnipresent sexism against women and girls — in fact I already taught, researched, and wrote about it as an academic specialty. Yet there was something about the message sent through that poster — the words, the image, the placement — that seemed somehow different than the messages I received through feminist journals, classrooms, teachers, and friends. Simpler, more hopeful; cleaner, and somehow, more beautiful? I couldn’t quite put it into words, but this flyer was doing something for me that years of feminist education hadn’t, or hadn’t done in exactly that way. It hit me in the gut; it hit me in the heart.

A heart that I must admit, is breaking a little to write this section. After all, I *love* feminism. I identify as a feminist scholar and would ideally like to continue women’s and gender studies education long term. Not only that, I feel supported and well... *loved by* feminism, and by feminists. Having a language, history, and community of people to connect with, and voice like minded opinions and concerns to, has been incredibly powerful for me not only as an academic but as a person and a woman. In my research record — which consists almost entirely of gender based explorations — I have found and admired incisive feminist thinkers who have radically altered the academic world and made incredible social strides in a relatively short span of historical time. Let us not mistake impatience for forgetfulness, or dissatisfaction with our current state of affairs with a lack of recognition for all these amazing women have done.

Feminism is, and has been, a powerful force for change that has, objectively and historically, accomplished many actual changes for the improvement of women — including bringing awareness of systemic sexism, and ties between individual lives and cultural factors, to



the fore. These laudable facts were acknowledged by my participants, but alongside a troublingly mixed picture of how feminism is perceived today, and how useful it still is as a cultural therapeutic.

While all of my participants appreciated the historical impact of feminism, identified as feminists, and felt embraced within the feminist community, most felt ambivalent about feminism's capacity to continue to enact the kind of major cultural changes currently needed. As summarized in the first Results chapter, this ambivalence ranged quite a bit — Lillian was a particularly staunch defender of feminism and the need to continue to use the language of feminism, while Meghana, at the opposite end of the spectrum, identified as a feminist, but with a lot of hesitancy and sympathy for those who wouldn't. Meghana also felt using the word or label of feminism was not an effective strategy when doing her advocacy work, a sentiment shared to some degree by Hannah as well.

The crux of the issue for participants was generally framed as concepts versus labels. That is, while they all agreed with — and felt most people would agree with — basic concepts of feminism like sexual equality, and the existence of sexism, double standards, and stereotypes related to gender, participants felt that housing these concepts under the label of “feminism” changes the game and, often, makes conceptual agreement dissolve.

Before delving into their criticisms and insightful accounts of the tensions and potential problems with and within the field of feminism, it bears noting some of the many positive things that the participants had to say about feminism. Caitlin remarks that she is “proud to be a feminist” (CB4) and Sophie says, “I’ll always be the first to call myself a feminist” (SH14). Hannah notes that “I feel supported by feminist communities in the work that we’re doing,” (HB24) and “identifying as a feminist has opened up possibilities for my career and my work in a way that’s

completely the opposite of what I was led to believe would happen if I identified as a feminist” (HB26).

Meghana too describes that joining SAPAC “gave me the language to talk about these issues” (MK11), and Rebecca asserts that it’s important to not reject the term of feminism, remarking, “women are going to college on the *backs* of women who fucking fought for that right and being like ‘oh yeah I’m not a feminist.’ There’s this huge disconnect” (RN27). All participants also certainly identified the historical use of feminism, and the contemporary need for feminist battles – as Sophie notes:

“It’s not a minority issue. It’s the fact that like half of human beings have vulvas, you know? It’s not really a niche issue, it’s an issue of the majority.... You can say it doesn’t affect you but that actually doesn’t make any sense because no one lives in a world where they don’t interact with gender almost every day.” (SH15)

But whether these issues of the majority were best addressed under the moniker and ideology of feminism was a more contentious matter. Again it seemed that the actual word ‘feminism’ was one of the most problematic things about it, and participants often felt that public perceptions of what feminists think and do is not aligned with the reality. Caitlin conveyed that the adolescent age range she typically works with has “negative connotations” to the word feminism, without understanding what it truly means. She shared how she may say outright to people: “do you think women should be treated the same? Do you think they should be equal? Congratulations, you’re a feminist!” (CB4) to try and help reassert what feminism really means. Lillian points to this tension between concepts and labels as well, remarking:

“I just am flabbergasted that people can say ‘oh I’m not a feminist.’ Well, what does that mean? I know that people actually will say men and women aren’t equal and shouldn’t be. But I know that a lot of people who’d say ‘no, I’m not a feminist’ if you say ‘well, do you think women and men should be equal?’ They’d say ‘sure, yes.’” (LH32-33)

Meghana echoed Lillian’s experience, commenting: “you hear women saying ‘I’m a feminist *but*’. Or ‘I’m *not* a feminist, but I believe in women having equal rights.’ You hear that a lot, so that means there are a lot of people who are on board with the general idea of feminism” (MK22). Meghana also shared: “I wish it was easier for people to get on board with feminism because overall the message is anti-sexism, which makes total sense. I think people can rally around that and say there are statistics to back that up. Sexism exists, and so people can say ‘ok, I’m anti-sexist’” (MK20)

But anti-sexist does not a feminist make, or so it would appear. Hesitancy to “get on board” with the feminist label, or anything that calls itself feminism, was seen as a major limiting factor to feminist advocacy. Hannah notes that “people do have a really tight, boxed in idea of what feminism is” (HB28) and Sophie expressed that people perceive “certain requirements” (SH16) to calling themselves, or their work, feminist.

Meghana voiced that “it’s difficult for people to say that they are a feminist because of the negative connotation that comes with the term... they believe in what feminism stands for, but they don’t want to be associated with the negativity” (MK22). Hannah comments that “people are afraid that associating as a feminist will put them in a corner that they won’t be able to get out of” (HB25) and points out how this may indeed have been true in earlier generations, when feminism

was a fledgling movement.

Aside from the negative associations, or misperceptions of others, however, participants themselves — again all but Lillian — had some significant quarrels with feminism as an ideology and as a movement. Limited impact once again topped the charts, and concerns for audience were chief. Overwhelmingly, participants felt that identifying with feminism would restrict their range.

Hannah remarks that though FORCE is supported by both the art and feminist worlds, they don't speak directly to either because they "want to be attracting more people to the conversation who weren't already a part of it" (HB25). Hannah's comments suggest that anyone already aware of feminism probably already has access to the messages FORCE is trying to promote to the broader culture, a feeling that was shared by several other participants. Sophie too notes that a big problem with feminism, "is the word itself. I think it makes it about *women*, and not about people" and expressed her frustration that much of feminism is devoted to strictly "women's issues, and not about intersectional issues" (SH14) which she saw as an important aspect of feminism.

This disagreement over what feminism even means or should mean was also cited by several participants as a major flaw in the feminist movement, and feminism was portrayed as a highly critical, negative, and often divisive movement. Rebecca comments that, "we just criticize things and critique things and it's not a movement that thinks first about producing things, it's a movement that thinks first about criticizing" (RN28).

Meghana too felt that "there's a lot of contradictions within feminism" (MK19) and that "we as a group, feminists, are trying to combat sexism as a whole" but instead we are too often consumed with "fighting about what we stand for" (MK21). Caitlin expressed that "the label has been polluted" (CB4) and Sophie comments, "the ideas surrounding what feminism are a little bit, well, *very* excluding, and there are too many boundaries around it" (SH16) — boundaries that may

be unclear or ever changing.

Additionally, Rebecca took issue with the current goals of many feminists and felt the movement was often not representative of all of its members. She remarks, “instead of working for what affects more people, we’re working for these really specific things” (RN28) — many of which are bound up with race and class inequalities (i.e. focusing on the wage gap rather than welfare). Rebecca eloquently describes how feminism has fallen victim to both pressure and misperception from the outside, as well as internal discord from inside the movement:

“While the right wing is telling people that they don’t *want* to be feminists, it’s feminists who are going around telling people that they are *not* feminists, right? In response to external backlash, feminists created these hard boundaries and put themselves in a box. So it’s like everything that’s in the feminist box is feminist and everything that’s outside of the feminist box is not feminist, and if you don’t agree with me, that means you’re outside of my feminist box. And that’s a stupid way to build a movement [laughing]! Like a really bad way to build a movement. And it’s fucked up because it’s really academic so then it’s really classist, and it’s also real white, and white feminists are really bad at recognizing when they’re racist. So it’s all these ways it’s just not doing a good job of building a movement... academic feminists became so focused on self-defining themselves with all these theories that it became really irrelevant to women who are just going through their daily lives.” (RN26-27)

Rebecca’s comments point out that the perceived exclusivity of feminism is not just damaging rhetoric, but may actually reflect some of the evolution of the feminist movement which

has moved away from real life concerns in the minds of many (as the tensions between liberal and postmodern feminism explored in the introductory chapters affirm). Thus whether the problems come from outside, or inside, or outside moving inside, it seems that problems abound with using the language, and the legacy of feminism. Participants struggled with what this meant for them personally — should we abandon the term and find something new? Should we use it all the time in order to revise the understanding of it? Lillian certainly advocates for this latter concept, stating emphatically that,

“you need to say ‘I’m a feminist and this is what a feminist is.’ And I would say turn it around and make it not about me, make it about the person who’s asking, saying ‘well, aren’t you a feminist? What do you think it is? And why aren’t you a feminist?... you don’t think I should be equal?’” (LH35).

Caitlin also remarks that “I try to work it in casually and hope that the more people who say it, the more it will encourage people to say it. It took me saying, ‘I feel uncomfortable with this label’ and people being like, ‘you shouldn’t’ so it takes people being proud of being feminist” (CB4). Hannah notes that:

“I think it’s really important to not reject the term. There’s all this conversation about maybe it should be a different word or something because people feel alienated from it, and I think that’s ridiculous. Because I think at the root of the problem, people just don’t want to associate with feminism because of the stigma that’s always existed around it [and] the fear that a male dominated world will be replaced by a female dominated world.” (HB24)

Yet at the same time, Hannah and Rebecca are cautious of using the label of feminism when doing their work. Hannah seemed to feel conflicted about this, remarking:

“I think it’s important to use it, but yeah, we’re thinking really strategically about packaging and if there’s even a scent of feminist activism in any of this stuff, it’s going to give us away immediately. It’s *implied*. It’s implied in the work.... I’m not avoiding the term, but what I’m doing is I’m describing what feminism is, through the action and through the work that we’re doing. And then it opens and expands people’s minds about what feminism can be.” (HB27-28)

Meghana and Sophie seemed to adopt a similar strategy of trying to open up the term by using it when they thought it would be understood in a way they meant, and leaving it out in favor of conceptual description when they thought it would be limiting. Sophie describes “an obligation” (SH14) that she and many other women her age feel to identify as feminists but also feeling like “it’s valid to engage with issues of gender and issues of sex without having to label yourself that” (SH16). This flexibility to adapt or abandon the label seemed to be a common compromise that my participants struck between the debt they felt they owed to historical feminism, and the genuine limitations and criticisms of feminism they felt were valid.

I find myself still feeling torn as I conclude this section, as though the question is whether feminism is good or bad, should be thrown away or embraced whole heartedly, followed blindly or condemned for its faults, when of course I know the truth can never be so simple. In fact there *are* many debts that not only women, but all of society owe to feminism and to its tradition of cultural

change. And in fact there *are* many historical limitations to feminism, not the least of which is an institutionalized exclusion of people who are not upper class white women (hooks, 1987). I too have experienced the tension between concepts and labels in my own classroom, many times, when I too may ask, “who here is a feminist?” only to find one or two very enthusiastic students who can’t raise their hands high enough. Yet when I ask about double standards and stereotypes, I find ready agreement from nearly all students, both men and women.

What we do with the term ‘feminism’ — give it up, change its meaning, or forge on ahead — remains to be seen, both individually and culturally. Regardless, however, it seems we must admit that there are some crucial shortcomings in feminism’s ability to heal our culture and its women. Though this may or may not be due to the essential nature or value of feminism, these limitations exist, and they seriously impact the effect that feminist activism can have. While feminism offered a space of individual healing for many of my participants, and a place to connect and see alternative possibilities, too often they feel that feminism falters when it comes to actually taking action, or to raising public awareness outside of the “feminist box.”

*Cultural therapeutics: Culture jamming (creative activism)*

*“Any advertisement in public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours. It belongs to you. It’s yours to take, re-arrange, and re-use. Asking for permission is like asking to keep a rock someone just threw at your head.” - Banksy, graffiti artist (2006, p. 196)*

Having examined a few important cultural therapeutics already at our disposal – art,



protest, education, and feminism – and found critical gaps and limitations with regards to audience and impact, how else might we conceptualize a cultural therapeutic? How can we supplement these measures to work better, or faster, towards healing our culture of the symptoms of patriarchy, born out through our women every day? While art, protest, education, and feminism have been and continue to be very valuable practices, they are clearly not enough to stem the tide of violence and marginalization that my participants described encountering on a daily basis.

If what we need is public recognition how can we reach a massive audience? If what we need is connection how can we make sure all are welcome in that audience, and no one feels excluded? If what we need is action, how can we mobilize people to act rather than simply giving them a lecture to listen to or a piece of art to view? If what we need is alternative models to point to, how can we show them in everyday spaces, and offer solutions rather than historical analysis or criticism only?

Culture jamming may be an answer. Though culture jamming has its own unique and distinct history (as outlined in the Literature Review), I have chosen to use culture jamming and creative activism as interchangeable terms here, since neither Lillian nor Caitlin had actually heard of the term culture jamming before I used it – though their actions certainly use the same principles and draw upon the same concepts. While of course there are many actions that may be considered creative activism that are not culture jamming, all culture jamming could be accurately described as creative activism, so this compromise was made to acknowledge the fact that several participants would not (at least previously) identify their work as culture jamming specifically.

As my participants revealed, culture jamming has helped them and other women to feel effective, take action, see alternative models, connect and share with other women, and feel as though they are working towards greater public awareness of women's struggles. They

importantly felt that culture jamming was able to succeed in realms where other cultural therapeutics may fail, or be limited, and they detailed the ways in which culture jamming can fill some of the holes left by art, activism, feminism, or education. This ability is largely because culture jamming is a very unique practice which functions in several unexpected and interesting ways, among them: infiltrating the everyday space, packaging and marketing strategically, using cultural messages and systems against themselves, and gathering a massive audience.

*Everyday space, everyday packaging*

*“It’s really about packaging in a lot of ways” - Hannah Brancato*

One of the most fruitful aspects of the culture jamming approach for many participants is that it transcends boundaries of space and label. Particularly as they felt the limits imposed by the label of feminism, or the confines of the classroom or gallery space, creative activism provided participants with a way to put the messages they would prefer out there in the everyday discourse, where no special education, label, or requirements were needed to access them. Lillian notes that by acting in everyday spaces — at the magazine rack, on a public bathroom mirror, or online — creative activism “doesn’t distinguish the audience or discriminate” in ways that other traditional cultural therapeutics might, but “it’s just anybody, everybody” (LH20).

Participants also stressed that appearing as something that is already integrated into the audience’s normal, everyday life was part of what makes culture jamming effective for raising awareness and potentially triggering widespread change. Hannah notes, “we also know that the message is compelling and that there is an audience for it if it can be packaged in the right way, you

know?” (HB10).

Hannah’s comments suggest – as the issue of concepts versus labels in feminism belies – that most people want, or might want, a different culture... they just don’t realize there are alternatives or have access to a means to action. “Packaging” or “marketing” messages in the right way, to reach a larger audience in a more sympathetic manner, was then often cited as important to grabbing the individual’s attention, and ultimately working towards social change.

For Lillian, having her flyers appear in “the everyday space... the very personal space, the daily life” (LH23) was very important, as “a kind of interrupter” (LH26) — something that looks glossy, colorful, and sturdy like a magazine cover, but carries a very different message. Caitlin, Sophie, Hannah, Rebecca, and Meghana all talked about creative activism as “sneaky” in some way and that part of why culture jamming is able to work is because it occurs in the daily space, and looks just like a normal part of life. This means that not only do more people have greater access to alternative messages, they also are more likely to read, view, or hear out the messages before immediately rejecting them because of their own associations (often the trouble cited with protest or feminist activism).

Sophie notes that because feminism has such a bad rap, feminist messages do “kind of have to come in a Trojan horse” (SH29) which then means that “people are gonna interact with it because they don’t *know* that it’s feminist” (SH28). Rebecca comments that activists have to be willing to work with packaging things in ways people will hear — “you have to be a little bit more practical, and even conniving” (RN31) — and Hannah likens this to getting people in the door before they know where they’re going but that then, “people end up there...they’re like ‘oh, I want to be here!’” (HB28). This allows for alternative messages and models to “seep into people’s minds without having the chance to alienate them” (SH31) first. Not only does this unique feature

of culture jamming allow for a bigger audiences to receive the message, it potentially has the doubled effect of helping people to gain a different understanding of what feminism is, and what feminists do.

The “flashy” (HB51) nature of many of the culture jams — FORCE’s work in particular — was often identified as something that helps make creative activism an effective tool for cultural change. Meghana comments that, “in the culture that we’re [in], everyone is kind of competing for attention in people’s headspace, [culture jamming] is a very, very effective way of getting that attention” (MK12). Both Meghana and Hannah stressed how culture jamming events can be a “spark” to gain a lot of awareness and excitement for an issue, which then inspires other forms of action.

Part of how creative activism is able to get so much attention is by occurring in the daily discourse, but also by packaging itself to look like just another ad, Facebook page, magazine, or random post-it... but with a sudden and eye catching twist. Meghana describes: “in this culture you know we go on the Internet, read two or three articles about stuff we’re interested in. But when someone does something really unique on the Internet, or talks about something in a way we haven’t thought about before, that’s what grabs our attention” (MK12).

Approaching the topic in a *new way* was frequently discussed as part of the “packaging” that culture jamming is able to strategically use. That is, people *expect* to hear about sexual assault at Take Back the Night, or they *expect* to learn about sexism in their women’s studies classes — if they don’t want to be bothered with those messages, they can just avoid those spaces. People also expect for messages about equality or gender to come in certain packaging: under the label of feminist, accompanying a rape crisis hotline number, or with serious and provocative imagery like “showing a picture of a woman with a black eye” (RN3). The actions of my participants eschew

this traditional approach and advocate new forms of packaging that are softer, less aggressive, and use a “positive perspective” (MK25) focused on action and change.

Rebecca notes that this kind of marketing for feminist messages, or messages of empowerment, is new in that it is “synthesizing” (RN4), or combining elements in new ways: such as humor and sexual assault, or advertising imagery and body confidence. This was particularly powerful for Sophie and Meghana, who felt it was important to have “a message about something that’s like social justice but that’s not threatening” (SH31). Meghana in particular felt that the jams work partly because “it’s not this person yelling in your face that they deserve to be heard” (MK16). She astutely observes:

“The negative messaging isn’t well received, and that’s unfortunate you know?... trying to make people care by saying ‘sexual assault affects one in four women on this campus,’ people will be like ‘oh my gosh wow’ but then will never think about it the rest of the day or the rest of the year. Unfortunately making people care in that way doesn’t work and that’s really disappointing. But coming at it from a positive perspective, that’s when people listen and that’s been really effective so far” (MK25).

In all of these comments we find a unifying thread of access, and availability, through strategically approaching space and packaging. This not only allows social change to happen faster, it allows individuals to have the therapeutic experience of seeing an alternative possibility, feeling connected, and often, having the opportunity to take action. Further, individuals get it all without having to go to therapy, college, or Take Back the Night.... just their local grocery store, Facebook page, or the bathroom at their school. If public awareness is a major first step to social

change, culture jamming provides a unique and potentially very valuable way of doing just that by appearing to people *in* their everyday lives, as a non-threatening part *of* their everyday lives.

*Gathering and empowering a massive audience*

*“A platform for people to be active and to have dialogue and to be part of a movement” -*

*Hannah Brancato*

Precisely because it does appear in the everyday space and use the packaging of mainstream media, culture jamming and creative activism are extremely effective at reaching a huge amount of people at once. Because women *do* exist as a marginalized population and typically are not in control of the messages being sent about them — messages which nevertheless may directly or indirectly harm them — the experience of taking back control of the messaging, even for a moment, and knowing that an enormous number of people are listening can be an extremely therapeutic experience for women.

All participants felt that creative activism’s use of the everyday is “very effective, obviously, in reaching a broader audience” (MK11) and that using alternative and creative methods can help one to be a part of the “mainstream conversation,” (HB9) rather than simply being shunted into ‘women’s issues.’ Partly because they are so flashy and creative, acts of culture jamming “work *immediately*,” (SH34) and participants were hopeful that creative activism can “achieve bigger and more powerful messages that get a lot of attention” and “create change faster” (MK12) by reaching so many people at once.

Sophie notes that she was so empowered through the Playboy jam partly because she felt a

sudden success in gathering a huge audience that had previously been inaccessible to her: “this was like the smallest thing I’ve ever done!... all I did was ask some of my friends to post something on Facebook...sometimes I think we just overthink it, you know? That your input is going to equal your output and sometimes that’s simply not true” (SH51-52). Sophie’s comments point out how even though culture jamming is short term and flashy, this does not necessarily mean a small impact, just as the large and often expensive efforts of education or protest do not necessarily guarantee a large impact. Working in an activist community, she comments that “that kind of stuff, you try so hard to make it happen, and then it just happens! [It’s] just so organic” (SH57).

Not only does culture jamming allow for the kinds of numbers that other cultural therapeutics may preclude, it also *motivates* its audience to action rather than allowing or encouraging them to just passively receive a message. Unique to creative activism is this focus on mobilizing a chain of action, and all of the jams included here encourage participation and/or provide a clear path of action for audience members to take if they desired — to email Lillian for flyers, to post their own Operation Beautiful notes, to participate in the Consent Revolution Awards, or even just to go to a website to find out more.

Meghana notes that after the press frenzy of the Playboy jam, “we had different universities contacting us about having No Shave November for Consent at their schools, so we made sure to share our resources” (MK9). Ultimately, this led to “a lot of collaboration between schools” (MK9) that far exceeded the reach of the Playboy jam, and rippled outward. As Meghana’s example illustrates, culture jamming can inspire and motivate people to take up the action themselves, or to do something slightly different that speaks to their concerns. Because it is usually fairly simple and by definition very accessible, jamming serves to not just pique people’s interest, but to foster their sensibility that others are acting, they could act too, and indeed they could use

*this* opportunity to do so.

In this way, culture jamming operates something like a virus, infecting the host culture, at first without much alarm because it looks and feels like any other part of the body. Once inside the host, however, it begins immediately replicating, mutating, and spreading out — both in the same form and in new permutations — and, just like a virus, it may eventually take over. This virality is akin to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the rhizome, which “may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (p. 9), constantly moving and changing, unlike the model of the stable and linear root-tree.

Part of why culture jamming works so well is that it cannot be contained, located in a unified source, or even necessarily traced to an author (the specific actions I chose were mostly selected because I could actually *find* who had done them; many culture jamming actions are anonymous or so deeply embedded within other art and actions it is impossible to tell where they originated). Using the body of media already in place, culture jamming seizes hold of the reproduction mechanisms and begins copying itself, spreading to huge amounts of people who also replicate, or mutate the messages, and pass them on.

Caitlin certainly spoke to this viral, proliferating effect, describing how if Operation Beautiful becomes “cool” at a particular school, it can take over and become a structural part of the institution, with Operation Beautiful clubs that run their own events, and post-its all over every bathroom mirror — “if the cool girls do it or pick it up then it’s really cool and the whole school starts doing it” (CB7). Caitlin also described how girls can use the basic format of empowerment to tailor messages to what they particularly want to write and see, remarking, “I think that’s one of the reasons it’s been so successful, because it’s easy and it’s simple. It’s very malleable for different people and can reflect whatever they want” (CB3). In this way Operation Beautiful’s



form of creative activism allows for women and girls to have their unique voices heard, while also connecting to part of a larger movement, *and* taking effective action.

Hannah and Rebecca spoke to the spiraling effect of FORCE's work as well, saying, "the way it was bigger than what we anticipated was kind of a chain," (RN14) wherein their jams inspired people to do their own work and to take up the messages in even more new and different ways. Hannah notes, "it's really cool to see that people are continuing conversations in ways that are relevant to them" (HB20) and elaborates,

"A lot of those college students have started their own projects ... it's exciting because we know about a few, but there's probably so many more ... I do think that it's interesting the way that these events spread through culture, because everybody that is influenced by it might not know directly about the action, or what FORCE is, or even what Pink Loves Consent was, but [they] still could be affected or influenced by it... I was seeing a lot consent underwear that I don't take credit [for], I don't think that Pink Loves Consent necessarily caused people around the world to make consent underwear. But I do think that it made that idea more mainstream, or accessible, you know? I guess I'm always excited when I see the influence or effect of it in ways that spread beyond where I realized it would" (HB41-42).

Hannah's comments demonstrate the powerful, mobilizing force that culture jamming can provide, as well as illustrating how culture jammers can use the concepts and tools of negatively infectious ideologies and turn them on their heads, releasing their own rapidly spreading viral messages through the bloodstream.

Just as women are often affected by sexism in subtle, daily ways that they couldn't necessarily enumerate or point to, creative activism works in the same sneaky manner, sneakily changing the discourse as sheer numbers add up, and people share and take part in the action. Because it works in the public, everyday space, provides an alternative message in attractive and approachable packaging, and encourages people to act, jamming's effects can spread rapidly throughout the environment that receives it. And, because it engages with "mass audiences" and "millions of people," (RN1) that effect can add up to quite a lot.

In many ways, this is simply taking the logic that works so well for selling Nikes, and Coca-Cola, or Victoria's Secret underwear. You take your product, make it cool, put it where lots of people can find it, and then give them something to do in order to be a part of that cool. Except of course here the 'product' is radical change, and the action is not a trip to the mall, but a revolution. This logic of marketing may have some unsettling implications, which I will discuss in the next chapter, but it is nevertheless a time tested and effective strategy for propagating discourse.

Lillian specifically transitioned from simply dropping BJTWYA flyers herself to sharing them because she felt that "doing it myself was not going to bring me that sense of fulfillment," (LH13) and that it was important to her to motivate and inspire others to act too. Indeed, BJTWYA flyers call the project, "an invitation to act" and Lillian explains:

"One of the things that was valuable to me about the magazine project is that other people can do what I did.... It's not enough just for me to do something.... I just said 'here, you do it.' 'You do something.' 'You *all* do something.' 'Here, spread it. Give it to everybody who you feel would want to do something that's so easy to do'... it's so simple and it costs

almost nothing” (LH51)

Lillian’s flyers certainly had a therapeutic effect for me, and a rippling effect in motivating this very research — as far as impact goes, an entire dissertation produced from one little flyer is quite a punch indeed! It is exactly this punch, delivered to huge audiences, and with a prescription for action, that is part of what makes creative activism an important new cultural therapeutic, and one we should not be quick to dismiss or overlook.

As my participants explained to me, the crucial limitations of diversity, and range, of audience that they felt in virtually all other realms of cultural change and activism — interpersonally, politically, artistically, and educationally — can be overcome via culture jamming’s clever borrowing of the mainstream platforms of media and everyday space. By harnessing this volume, rather than trying to fight against it or exist outside it, women may find a way to take action, connect with each other, raise awareness *and* spread important alternative messages.

*Perverting and subverting: Using cultural forces against themselves*

*“We’re building a counter culture, but we’re using the tools of the dominant culture” -*

*Rebecca Nagle*

Perhaps the most remarkable and noteworthy of all of the interesting aspects about culture jamming, however, is how it ties together all that has been described so far and uses the cultural machinery of media to turn on itself, rather than attempting to destroy it from the outside. Again,

like a virus — or like the ideologies that have infected women that jammers are attempting to eradicate — creative activism attacks from within, using the very tools, imagery, and media of oppressive discourse to send new, alternative messages of freedom and empowerment.

Sophie remarks that in order to really “change what’s in the media” we have to “sort of force these other interpretations in and actually from all angles jam up the system” (SH44). That is, working within the media and formats that people already know, trust, and understand, while at the same time revealing the weaknesses and discrimination within those formats.

Viruses are so dangerous precisely because they co-opt the tools, and circumvent the established guards, of the body itself. The body doesn’t attack a virus because it doesn’t recognize it is a foreign element, allowing the virus access to vital physical centers where it can then tear apart the basic structure of other cells. Appearing in the heart of our society (the media) culture jamming sneaks into the social bloodstream (each of our individual minds), where it can then take hold and begin copying its new template, overwriting the old cellular structure. Not only is this kind of subversive infiltration clever, it *works*. It *has* worked for disseminating viruses like patriarchy and sexism and now, jammers hope, it will also work for them, to create a new structure, and a new alternative.

Meghana notes that taking “something really well integrated into our society like Playboy or like No Shave November and using that to push your agenda forward is a lot more powerful” (MK11-12) than working outside the system. Not only did participants feel that working outside the system had limits to its impact — such as audience size, as has been discussed — but they acknowledged the reality that mainstream media and social institutions have unparalleled resources.

As Sophie puts it, “we can’t make a large budget romantic comedy!” yet at the same time,

“if this an issue that comes from the media, then it’s something we need to attack through the sources that it’s coming from” (SH26). Lacking resources in an unequal capitalist economy, culture jammers instead simply take over the media outlets that exist, for however long they can, and hope to create alternative messages within those systems. Battling somewhat with her feminist education, Meghana explained:

“There’s the idea in feminism that you can’t dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools... You can’t work within the system and enact change, you have to work outside the system, create a new system and create a new language for you. But this is the reality we live in ... this is what we have. So working with people and corporations that do have that power, and showing them that this is an effective way to market is what these culture jamming things are doing, and I think it is working overall.” (MK30)

Meghana’s comments illustrate a tension in feminist advocacy (essentially illuminating the fundamental difference in the stance of postmodern feminists, who refuse to participate in oppressive practices, and liberal feminists, who work within dominant systems to effect change) and a tension that echoes throughout this dissertation – is the cost of using problematic discourses and systems worth the payoff of potential change? For jammers at least, the answer is a tentative yes. Sophie points to how culture jamming can shine a spotlight on powerful corporations and force change to happen by creating a demand for alternative messages from within, saying:

“The other thing that I realized and was amazing about [the Playboy jam] was how uncontroversial of an issue it actually was. It was just a silent issue. Because a lot of people

ask me, ‘do you think you’re gonna get in trouble? Do you think they’re gonna get in trouble?’ And I just definitively say no because it would be so, so devastating for Playboy to be like ‘no, we don’t believe in consent.’ Like they would just be fucked up for that, you know? They would slander themselves so much more terribly than we ever could. So what are they gonna say? ‘You shed light on the fact that we *don’t* promote consent’? ... we kind of backed them into a corner” (SH55-56)

As Sophie’s comments illustrate, jamming can cleverly use the forces of capitalism against corporations in order to pressure them into participating in a new discourse – one of the women’s, and not the corporation’s, choosing. The most obvious example of this subversion amongst the participant set is FORCE’s work, in which they literally took the brand, imagery, and writing style of Victoria’s Secret and used it to critique the damaging ideals that Victoria’s Secret not only sends to women and girls, but actively profits from. FORCE’s work is particularly interesting in that it not only raised awareness of the ways in which Victoria’s Secret promotes and benefits from objectification and rape culture — as well as provided general education about those terms and issues — but by stirring up awareness in the particular way that they did, FORCE created a real and actual demand for change.

Because so many people were fooled into thinking that Pink Loves Consent panties were real, when it was revealed that they weren’t, people were doubly disappointed. Victoria’s Secret was flooded with emails demanding they *actually create* the panties that Hannah and Rebecca had designed, as well as newly dissatisfied customers complaining about the current styles. Additionally, when Victoria’s Secret tried to shut down Pink Loves Consent almost immediately with a legal cease-and-desist — groundless, since FORCE’s work is covered under parody

protection laws — they were forced to withdraw it just as quickly when it became apparent that *they*, not FORCE, were fast becoming the villains in the thousands strong narrative unfolding online.

This is some of the true genius of culture jamming — not only did FORCE use the tools of media and marketing to turn Victoria's Secret's brand against them, they used the very structure of capitalism against itself by targeting the one thing that corporations in power truly cannot ignore: consumer demand. Judging by the outpouring of positive reactions to Pink Loves Consent panties, it seems that Hannah is right when she states: “there is a demand for a more authentic sexual empowerment to be mainstream” (HB11) — a demand FORCE cleverly tapped and mobilized in both their jams.

Victoria's Secret is, after all, a business — it stands to reason that at a certain tipping point, they'll do what the customers want, no matter how much they may or may not like it. By not only raising awareness, but creating a *demand* that a capitalist corporation could not deny, Hannah and Rebecca took the systems in place that were enraging and harming them, and used them to launch a viral attack from within. And to some extent, their demand was met. The newest line that Victoria's Secret released after the Pink Loves Consent jam was called “I Love My Body” — one of the slogans on FORCE's consent themed underwear — and Rebecca noticed that “they stopped for a period of time selling the more offensive slogans, they took them down” (RN18).

Rebecca describes the “I Love My Body” campaign as highly problematic — “it was like five Victoria's Secret models posing... like, if you're emaciated, if you have a lot of body privilege, love your body!” (RN18) — but nevertheless was enthusiastic about the possibilities that it indicated: “it was a fucked up version of our message but *still*, them being like ‘oh, we should put this message out there I guess’” (RN19) is crucially important. While being quick to

deny any specific credit, Hannah and Rebecca both felt they were “part of a collective voice that’s making a pretty significant difference,” (HB51) and marveled that two “little people who are doing guerrilla warfare” (RN3) could actually impact the marketing strategies of a massive cultural icon like Victoria’s Secret.

There is reason indeed for Rebecca’s enthusiasm — FORCE after all, is literally two women who had an idea. Part of what is so compelling about culture jamming is simply the gall of it — who thinks they can just take Victoria’s Secret’s branding and use it to market empowerment instead of objectification? Who, when they think of activism, thinks they can just pretend to be Playboy, or go head to head with *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen* magazines in the aisles of the drugstore? As the work of my participants shows, several women at least, and what so fascinated me was that part of it seemed to have to do with an ability to *see* differently.

I approached this project assuming the participants were motivated out of rage, or a desire to advocate for other women who were suffering — and partly, particularly for Caitlin and to some extent Lillian and Rebecca, that was true. However part of the motivation was also a way in which the women I interviewed could see their way out of the system, or somehow realized that media is actually much more vulnerable, much more tenuously held together than it might like for people to believe. Hannah describes how FORCE decided to attack Victoria’s Secret, a decision that came as she and Rebecca were flipping through a Victoria’s Secret catalog, and happened upon a pair of underwear with “Sure Thing!” splashed across the crotch:

“We realized that that was like a hole in this system.... For us, it was like a way in.... this underwear is supposed to be empowering and, and promote fun, and promote fun, exciting, healthy sexuality among young women and we knew that that doesn’t make women feel



empowered, you know? So we *saw it*, right? It's *ridiculous*. We saw it as a hole in the system where we could enter in and have a conversation." (HB8)

This is a fascinating insight, and one that harkens back to Foucault's explication of disciplinary power as that which oppresses through internal subjugation and regulation rather than enforced obedience or subservience. That is, as Foucault (1975) argues, the keenest and cleverest power is power/knowledge which encourages individuals, by introduction of the disciplinary gaze, to adhere to standards of normalcy, despite their own desires, urges, or even bodies.

By creating certain knowledges about women — what women can and can't do; what one can and can't do to women — women are thus subject of and subject to certain powerful discourses which function to oppress, not by *force*, but by the "power of the Norm" (Foucault, 1975, p. 182) as women police *themselves* to fall in line. This norm was constructed, however, an (admittedly extremely powerful) fiction, that could indeed be overturned. The current oppression of women in this culture is largely not a matter of men with guns (though obviously violence against women is still unacceptably high), but of a tight system of messages and myths that convince women to themselves *buy into* the system of oppression.

The media certainly function as a kind of panopticon for women — an eye that always sees — encouraging, and simultaneously subtly enforcing, new and ever changing requirements for beauty and sexiness, while concurrently devaluing women for being anything but beautiful and sexy. In a constantly shifting landscape, women chase self-worth by chasing the latest diet, fashion trend, or relaxation tip, without realizing the ways in which they are becoming commodified and subjecting themselves to a system that they actually could opt out of. As Kalle Lasne (1999) puts it, this constitutes "a form of mental slavery that we are free to resist, *only it never occurs to us to*

*actually do so*” (p. 418, italics original).

This ability to see the opt out is part of the gift and insight of the women I interviewed: to somehow shake themselves free for a moment of the pervasive and ubiquitous system of oppression and realize that what holds such a system in place is not the factual inferiority or sexual nature of women, but an insidious network of beliefs interlocking with capitalist and social practices that benefit from unequal distributions of power. This system feeds itself on the belief and the subsequent suffering of women, who ascribe to it mostly willingly, not realizing that there are other possibilities and for some, not even realizing the true damage that such ascription will cause or *is* causing.

Hannah describes seeing through this “myth” and finding a fault line within the system – a hole – which provides a destabilizing point, allowing others to see that that they don’t need to buy into a culture that seeks to destroy them, that there *is* another way. That in fact, “it wouldn’t be that hard” (HB10) to dismantle the destructive machinery... if only we could just see our way out. This kind of creative activism that uses the tools of the system against itself is most healing in that women can create the legitimate perception of an alternative — a real, *attainable* alternative. Meghana describes:

“That’s what was really smart about the [Playboy] campaign is that it said ‘this is how things should be’ and people reacted positively to it. Really positively to it. Same with the Victoria’s Secret campaign, people reacted so positively to it. And Victoria’s Secret is a line for *women*, it should be marketing towards women, and it should be marketing in a way that is empowering towards women, rather than objectifying them, or degrading them, or constantly trying to instill the idea in women’s minds that you are there for the pleasure

of men.” (MK29)

This indeed is gutsy activism — activism that simply pretends the future is here rather than begging or demanding it come to be. Rebecca sensitively comments, “these moments where a different kind of culture – even if it’s only for a little while – is at the forefront, or making headway, or disrupting the usual sort of thing, the normal way of things, I think that is really therapeutic” (RN8). She also points out that we need “these moments where you’re almost living in a different universe” in order to “break down that barrier for people” (RN9) who feel that nothing could ever change.

After all, if two women can take on Victoria’s Secret and mobilize college students all across the nation, what might each of us be capable of doing if we truly felt heard, connected, empowered, and able to effect change? Perhaps we wouldn’t have to settle for treating the effects of a damaged and damaging culture. Perhaps we could stem the problems of our patients, our friends, our sisters and our mothers, before they even *begin*, by treating the culture from which they spring.

### *Gesturing toward the therapeutic: Effects of creative activism*

#### ***Effects on jammers***

*“It feels triumphant in a way”- Rebecca Nagle*

Certainly it seems there is ample evidence that creative activism and culture jamming

exemplify the healing concepts of connection, action, public recognition, and access to an alternative, and that jamming may be successful in these aims where other cultural therapeutics may fail. If indeed these concepts are what our culture needs to begin transforming, then what about the individual effects of these actions?

Part of the basis for my arguments here is that the cultural effects are always already individual, and vice versa, because of the highly interrelated nature of individual and culture. My aim is to present creative activism as a cultural therapeutic precisely because I believe if we as a culture are able to achieve social change — or even to be in the process of changing — this can and will impact the individual lives of our patients, and of all women, necessarily indicating the interpenetration of individual and society. However, in addition to how culture jamming may help women by improving the environment that constitutes them, my participants also described immediate personal therapeutic effects, as well as observing effects on other women who witnessed their actions.

As I have already reviewed the role that connection, public recognition, taking action, and having access to alternatives played in the lives of my participants, this section will provide a summary of how participants generally experienced creative activism as personally fulfilling or beneficial. Additionally, while I felt audience data was important to include, the sheer amount of it is overwhelming, particularly in response to the work of FORCE and Operation Beautiful, since Hannah, Rebecca, and Caitlin used the internet as a primary medium. Given this, it is impossible to do a comprehensive overview of audience data here, as such an analysis would constitute a dissertation unto itself. Rather, for this section I first selected examples of audience feedback based on the categories I have already established – connection, public recognition, taking action, and having access to alternative images – to demonstrate how creative activism may be successful

in healing culture and impacting individual women.

However, since I collected this online data as part of the third, deconstructive reading, it is also important to me to include here some responses that go against what the jammers were hoping to accomplish, or stray from the effects I have laid out so far. Just as I have tried throughout these chapters to emphasize differences between participants where they occur, this section serves to acknowledge that while culture jamming is often successful in its aims, there are also some gaps or tensions within the practice. Further limitations of creative activism will be discussed in the following chapter.

Participants all felt that their creative activism had been a beneficial and extremely important part of their lives, describing it as “really exciting,” (RN12) “completely incredible,” (SH53) “so fulfilling,” (LH13) and “really rewarding” (MK10). Some participants, like Lillian, and to some extent Hannah and Rebecca, felt that culture jamming had given them a voice, and an avenue to fight feelings of despondency, anger, or hopelessness that were creeping into their lives.

Others, like Meghana, stressed how helping *others* was therapeutic and fulfilling, and that working with and changing the attitudes of “these fraternity guys who you never thought would actually care” has been powerful and “makes everything worthwhile” (MK25). Though Meghana sometimes felt advocacy could be draining, this was intimately tied to audience response, and when she felt that others were listening to, and respecting her, Meghana describes feeling invigorated by the work. As has already been described, Lillian also felt that connecting to others was a key element to her work, citing “what’s so fulfilling was that I then felt connected to them [the audience]” (LH13) and that that felt “very good.”

Both Hannah and Rebecca felt that jamming offered them a way to continue to work through their own experiences but on a different level and scale. By “doing the work” Hannah

notes she is able to “have the conversation” (HB38) and both she and Rebecca indicated that engaging in culture jamming has helped them to keep working on personal issues in different ways.

Sophie was perhaps the most effusive about how her participation in culture jamming has “had one of the most tremendous effects of my life,” (SH52) and been “incredibly empowering” (SH45). Particularly as a young student engaged in an activist community, the opportunity to continue to talk about the Playboy jam and its related issues to reporters and other media figures has been powerful for Sophie. Being able to be involved in an organization and movement that values her input was clearly exciting and rewarding for Sophie, and her participation in the Playboy jam has continued to be a part of her life nearly a year in the future.

For Caitlin, Operation Beautiful has thoroughly transformed her life, becoming her full time job and prompting her to write two books. She comments that “if I die tomorrow, I’ll be happy, I’m really proud of [the books] and the girls who’ve read it and who’ve said it helped them” (CB8). When I spoke with Caitlin, she seemed sometimes still a bit surprised at the path her life had taken, from a note posted in a bathroom to touring the country as a motivational speaker, authoring several books, running two websites full time, and being the head of a nationwide movement. She was also clearly humbled by the impact she had on so many lives, and especially valued the ability to reach out to young girls and affect them.

Across their accounts, the participants spoke of the generally positive effects that creative activism has had on their lives. In different ways, each felt she had benefited from reaching out to, connecting with, or helping others. Many also felt that activism allowed them a place to continue to unfold their own stories, or to express feelings and experiences that were not welcome or able to be expressed in other realms. Some participants, particularly Lillian and Meghana, emphasized the

exhaustion they sometimes feel as activists, but this seemed more linked to the social awareness their activist work brought them, and the exhaustion related to noticing so many daily instances of sexism and objectification.

### **Positive effects on audiences**

As the jammers felt enriched by and connected to their audience, so too did many audience members feel connected to and helped by the work of my participants. Again the overwhelming amount of response data precludes a thorough assessment of how creative activism is or is not successful as a therapeutic. Yet at the same time, this sheer amount is itself indicative that culture jamming is fairly effective at reaching a massive audience. The thousands (perhaps hundreds of thousands) of comments and articles available online responding to the work of my participants suggest that, regardless of what the responses are, people *are* noticing and responding to these jams. Thus the jammers' goal of public recognition and hope that their actions might serve as a catalyst for large scale conversation seems to bear fruit.

Additionally, however, much of the feedback I found via comments and tweets is openly positive. Audience members thank my participants, and often express gratitude that *someone* is finally talking about this issue (whichever it may be) and raising awareness. Finders of BJTWYA posters thank Lillian over and over again, describing the action as “brilliant and so necessary,” “a small revolution,” “encouraging and inspiring,” “an incredible gift,” or simply, “FABULOUS!” (“Testimonials”). Dozens of articles applaud FORCE’s work with both the Victoria’s Secret and Playboy jams as starting necessary conversations, and assert that greater recognition through these kinds of action is crucial – including one article simply titled, “Why Pink Loves Consent Is

Important”

Part of why the jams were able to garner such huge audiences of course is because they connected for audience members. All over the Operation Beautiful website, young girls describe over and again how transformative and important the experience of participating in, and connecting to, the Operation Beautiful community has been for them. User Lauren writes: “I have been doing this every day for five years. I love that there is a site where I can share the notes that help me get through the pain of living up to the ‘social standards.’” ‘Kaitlyn’ from Operation Beautiful shares:

“I go to high school and kids there can be tough. A friend of mine and myself posted sticky notes on all 600 lockers in our school, all saying ‘You’re beautiful.’ It was anonymous and all day her and I heard things such as ‘I actually feel beautiful for once’ ... I felt great knowing I had made someone’s day.”

‘Sam,’ who is “battling depression,” comments: “Operation Beautiful has turned my life around!” and similar statements from those who feel connected to the movement echo all over the website, and the Operation Beautiful Facebook page (*Operation Beautiful*, n.d.).

BJTWYA recipients also often write of feeling very connected to Lillian or to other women as a result of the BJTWYA action. One woman writes, “I just wanted to let you know that I have gotten together with Seattle’s Feminist Woman’s group and they find your project very exciting. We are all going to try to network more and more women who will request more flyers.” As these comments indicate, people often felt not only connected to others through jamming, but empowered and motivated to act. Another finder of a BJTWYA poster writes:



“I am a body activist and right now am working on a project in my home city where I am going to address issues concerning women’s shape and how media is discrediting the natural woman form that is beautiful (just the way it is). I think your form of activism is a great idea and I believe giving other woman the POWER to stand up by getting involved by posting your flyers wherever they feel just, will empower one woman at a time spreading awareness on this topic which I feel very strongly about.” (“Testimonials”)

Women — and men — who found BJTWYA posters often write about their excitement, the invigoration they felt, and a desire to make copies and begin distributing them right away. Just like my participants, audience members felt empowered by the acts of jamming they witnessed, and felt called to do something as a result. One witness writes: “I think this is going to hit a strong, and positive, nerve with a multitude of folk. All morning I’ve been forwarding your announcement to others” and another excitedly shares: “I am SO excited to receive the posters! It was only just tonight I was out with my friend putting up flyers that we hand made (about 50 of them!) in two busy streets” (“Testimonials”).

In my own experience, I too felt infected by the action element of BJTWYA, copying 30 additional flyers from the one I found in the grocery store and barging into my colleagues’ clinic offices the next afternoon, rallying: “who wants to go commit some social justice?” Some had classes to attend, or clients to see, but a friend sitting at her desk, writing a session note, shrugged and agreed — sure, why not? Together we took our stack to the Duquesne University bookstore and eagerly got to work, wedging flyers between pages and defiantly placing them atop covers. As we left, her hands shook slightly, and a beatific smile filled her face: “that was *amazing!*”

That same week I made another several dozen copies, and brought the action to the attention of the Intro Psych class I was teaching, leaving a stack at the front of the room for students to take on their way out. I received two emails later in the week, one from a male student who felt concerned on behalf of his three sisters for the state of society, and thanked me for giving out the flyers. The other was from a female student who had taken a stack of flyers and put them at the CVS nearby, writing: “Thank you SO MUCH for giving us those Beautiful Just The Way You Are posters. My friend and I used them on some really gross covers about ‘summer abs.’ Ew. It was so cool being able to actually do something about all of this bullshit. THANK YOU!”

As the feedback from my students suggests, part of why the action element of culture jamming felt so empowering for audience members was because it provides a glimpse of an alternative. FORCE’s work most explicitly draws upon the notion of providing alternative imagery and a sense of how the world might be, and the feedback regarding this move was overwhelmingly positive.

During both the Playboy and Pink Loves Consent jams, it is interesting to watch the public responses change and shift as people realize the jams are fake and not *actual* marketing campaigns from Playboy or Victoria’s Secret. Some of the initial coverage where people believe the campaigns are real is moving to read, with young girls, college women, women’s shelters, or campus organizations excitedly tweeting, sharing, or reporting that *finally* these companies are coming forward with some positive messages!

Still in the early stages of the campaign, user ‘Zerlina’ tweets: “Feminists, including me, have been saying we need to teach men not to rape. Thanks Playboy!” Similarly, user ‘Jessica’ excitedly tweets: “I am thrilled to see Yes Means Yes as a message in Playboy’s ‘party school guide.’ Progress!” (personal communication with Hannah Brancato, November 18, 2013). To

watch the tides turn online as users realize that in fact, the advertising they so appreciated is *not* the act of their current culture, is fascinating. Not only do people grow suddenly angry that this change hasn't occurred, often their anger seems to highlight for them precisely how badly they wanted this alternative, and how possible change really is.

Commenting on a write up of the Playboy jam, user 'Out of lurker son' comments:

"The fact that this campaign seems actually plausible IS THE POINT. Meaning, promoting consent wouldn't be that hard, or crazy, or square. It could be cool and fun and clever and on-brand. They've made it so Playboy can hardly even complain about the vandalism, which is pretty brilliant." (sent via personal communication with Hannah Brancato, November 18, 2013)

As these user comments illustrate, audience members felt inspired by FORCE's jams, and by the alternative view of reality presented by Hannah and Rebecca – the way it *could* be. Similar appreciation for an alternative of course is present in the BJTWYA and Operation Beautiful feedback, such as one participant in the BJTWYA project who writes, "The idea of the action is a great platform to start a small revolution, taking baby steps toward gaining back our respect as being seen as individuals, persons, and not objects." ("Testimonials").

When considering how audience members may feel connected, motivated to act, and empowered by an alternative, it is also interesting to compare tweets sent during the annual Victoria's Secret fashion show that use the hashtag #VSfashionshow (to denote they are related to the conversation about the fashion show) versus those trending with #LoveConsent (the hashtag campaign started by Hannah and Rebecca during the Pink Loves Consent jam). Searching Twitter

for the hashtag #VSfashionshow within the date range of the show (12/18/12 – 12/19/12) reveals some important, and startling, differences between the experiences of users writing under these two different tags.

Perhaps the most apparent difference is that the #VSfashionshow tweets show a depressing amount of self-objectification, negative self talk, or disturbing comparisons – such as user ‘Rachel’ who tweets: “me and the girls def just watched the #VSFashionShow again while eating 2 boxes of pizza and breadsticks. Feels like we committed a crime.” Or ‘malor’ who tweets: “#VSFashionShow, making girls feel insecure about their bodies since 1995”; or ‘Miriam’ who tweets: “If anyone needs me I’ll be doing sit ups for the rest of my life #vsfashionshow.”

The #LoveConsent tweets, however, have decidedly different themes. User ‘Benjamin’ tweets “I #LoveConsent because consent empowers both partners” and ‘Jaclyn’ tweets: “I #LoveConsent because there is no good reason that anybody shouldn’t. #victoriasssecret needs to stop their constant objectification of women.” (*FORCE on the Culture of Rape*, n.d.), These differing responses illuminate how discourse can be wielded to very different ends – by transforming the conversation about Victoria’s Secret annual fashion show, FORCE encouraged an outpouring of empowerment, support, and politically directed anger, rather than self-loathing and insecurity.

Though brief, this section hopefully provides a glimpse into the ways that response data preliminarily affirms the results I have outlined so far. Though I cannot accurately represent this data in quantitative terms, since hundreds of thousands of responses exist, the overwhelming majority of response data I encountered was positive. As the jammers would hope, audience members found the jams inspiring, motivating, interesting, or, at the very least, eye catching and cool. Further, many of the responses seem to support a view that gaining public recognition,

connecting to a community, taking action, and having access to an alternative are important elements of healing to both jammers and audience members, and can be accomplished through creative activism.

### **Other effects on audiences**

Before leaving the realm of response data, however, I would like to take care to include some of those responses which did *not* affirm my findings. Though they were a minority, I certainly encountered responses from those who did not feel that the jams were empowering, healing, or even necessary. Again, because FORCE's work took place predominantly online, there exists exponentially more easily available response data, including negative responses, for their work overall than for any of the other projects. I was unable to find any responses to BJTWYA, Meghana's work with SAPAC, or Operation Beautiful that did not in some way appreciate and affirm the projects, though Caitlin shared that she has received some emails from "angry janitors or business owners ... reading me the riot act about soliciting" (CB7).

For FORCE's work, however, due to the sheer number of responses, there was more access to a wide diversity of responses, including some negative ones. Though news coverage itself is generally positive or at least neutral, write ups in mainstream news outlets such as Huffington Post sometimes contain dismissive or combative responses in the comments section from readers which are illuminating in their own ways.

Some audience members seem to take issue with FORCE's right to use corporate branding, and there are comments on articles reviewing both Pink Loves Consent and the Playboy jam that either incorrectly question the legality of FORCE's actions (which were perfectly legal) or feel

that their use of company logos is somehow “unethical,” “misrepresentation,” or “brand fraud.” Interestingly, the few comments of this nature that I found generally also contained some statement from the user about how she or he agrees with an anti-rape message, but protests that using Victoria’s Secret or Playboy’s branding somehow maligns or mistreats the company. User ‘Travis’ writes:

“I mean, don't get me wrong, it's a great message, but their methods leave a lot to be desired. I don't think sending out press releases pretending to represent Victoria Secret was necessary... or entirely legal. Even if they haven't crossed the limits of Fair Use law, they are really pushing the edge of it. Which is a shame because it only seems to be undermining their purpose.” (comment on Polo, 2012)

Though this user is responded to by others refuting his comments and/or saying that issues of copyright infringement do not matter to them, or do not trump issues of sexual assault, the category of response was interesting to me. Do corporations really hold this level of esteem in our culture, that any critique of them invites defense of *the corporation*, and not the people it is harming? Or is the issue of sexual assault really so minimized that people see it as on par with corporate violation? It is difficult for me to grasp how people could object to a little corporate ego bruising if they took seriously the rates of violence against women, or truly understood how this violence is directly tied to the discourses of objectification that Victoria’s Secret promotes.

However, a link between the actions of companies like Playboy or Victoria’s Secret and the cultural prevalence of rape seems to be precisely what is missing for some commenters, who object to the jams as simply misguided, unnecessary, or silly. User ‘MissTake1989’ writes,

“Realistically, rape has ALWAYS existed in every culture in human history... for the most part telling a rapist not to rape makes as much sense as telling a killer not to kill or a robber not to rob. They ALREADY know it’s wrong. They do it anyway. Instead of hoping they will suddenly become better people, we take active steps to prevent them from harming us by being armed, knowing self defense, and having home security measures. This is no different.” (comment on Cheung, 2012)

While FORCE takes care in both the Pink Loves Consent and Playboy parody sites to spell out the ways in which consent and a culture of objectification contributes to sexual violence, some commenters either didn’t read fully through their materials, or simply aren’t buying it. Typically, those who disagree with the action on these grounds state either: 1) rape culture does not exist; or 2) rape is an inevitable part of human life that women can, and should, mitigate the risks of in their personal behavior (as MissTake1989’s comments illustrate). In user ‘Ivan’s comment one can practically hear the eye roll as he types: “Now feminists are saying your panties are the problem because they say yes. No wonder even women are being forced to say they believe in gender equity but get upset if anyone calls them a feminist.” (comment on Cheung, 2012)

The unspoken assumption in ‘Ivan’s comments of course is that panty slogans and gender equity are completely unrelated, and feminists like FORCE are picking silly and trivial battles. Responses like ‘Ivan’s and ‘MissTake1989’s demonstrate how some audience members simply do not see – or do not want to see – the ways in which cultural discourse relates directly to issues of equality and sexism. Obviously, if one does not believe an issue to be social in nature, social interventions will seem inappropriate or unimportant, as these comments illustrate.

Generally, an objection to either the corporate packaging or the premise of the intervention was at the heart of the (relatively few) negative responses I found to FORCE's work. This feedback is useful for appreciating that jamming is of course not a universally effective therapeutic and that, regardless of their reasons, some people simply will not resonant with a jam. I think this is no way detracts from the value of creative activism as a cultural or individual therapeutic and would again emphasize that these critical responses were outweighed by appreciative ones.

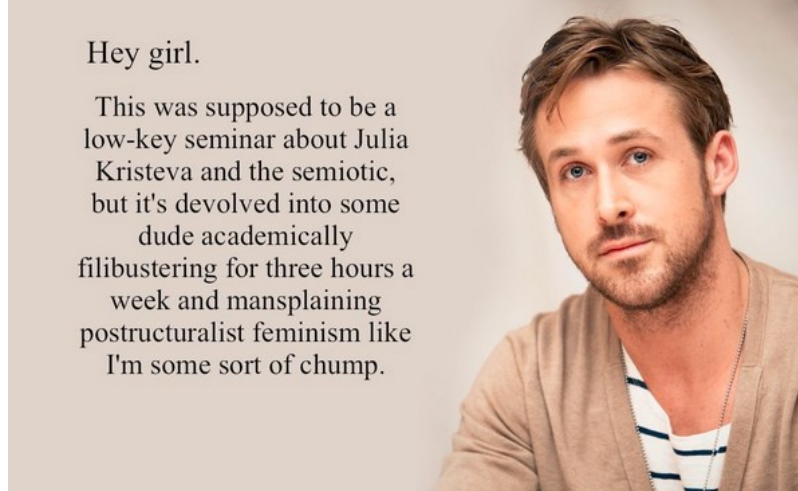
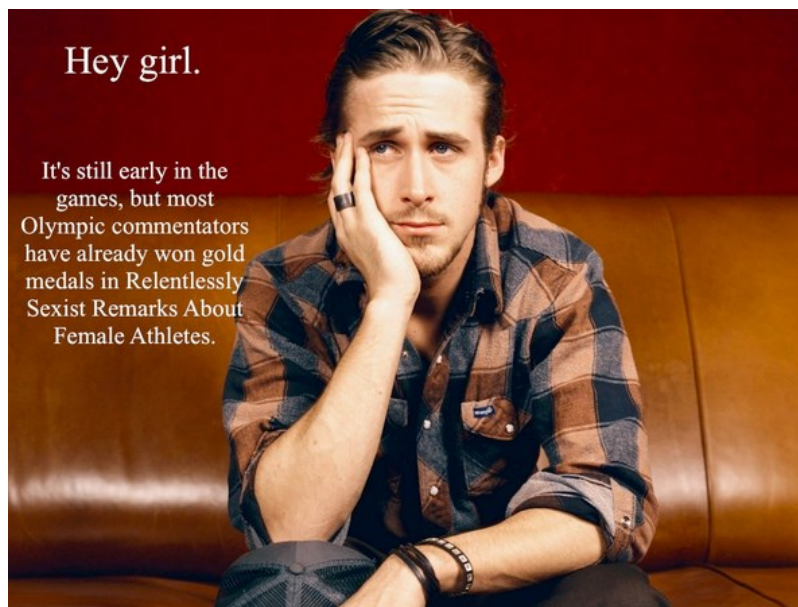
However, in the spirit of the third reading and as a gesture towards representing the effects of culture jamming from as many angles as possible, these critical responses are important to consider. The reader should of course know that some audience members will inevitability feel alienated from the message or methods of creative activism alongside the limitations which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Though this section is brief, and does not in any way pretend to be conclusive, it is my hope that it serves as an adjunctive to the six accounts of activists I have presented, and to my own reactions and responses to the work that I have described. Though more research is clearly needed, these additional perspectives from audience members serve as a check against the relatively small participant pool size and suggest that culture jamming may indeed have the individual and cultural therapeutic effects that my participants espoused and hoped for.



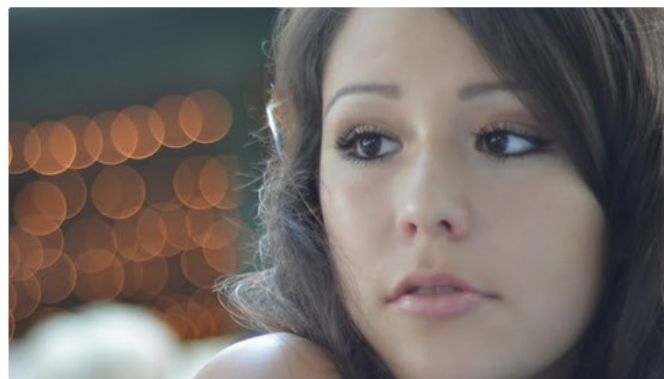
## Intersection 2: More materials

In the same spirit as the first intersection, this small section serves as a break and a glimpse into more of the materials I was interacting with during this project.





These are some selections from the Tumblr and Internet-famous meme Feminist Ryan Gosling. Created by a graduate student in gender studies, Danielle Henderson, the meme took off in popularity because of the unexpected pairing of a mainstream male movie star with dense, feminist academic thought. Images were taken from: <http://feministryangosling.tumblr.com/> and can be credited with getting me through many a long day's dissertation work (as well as being an interesting double take)



Senator DeLeon: Pass Audrie's Law,  
(Audrie Pott), Senate Bill 838

By The Pott Family  
Saratoga, California

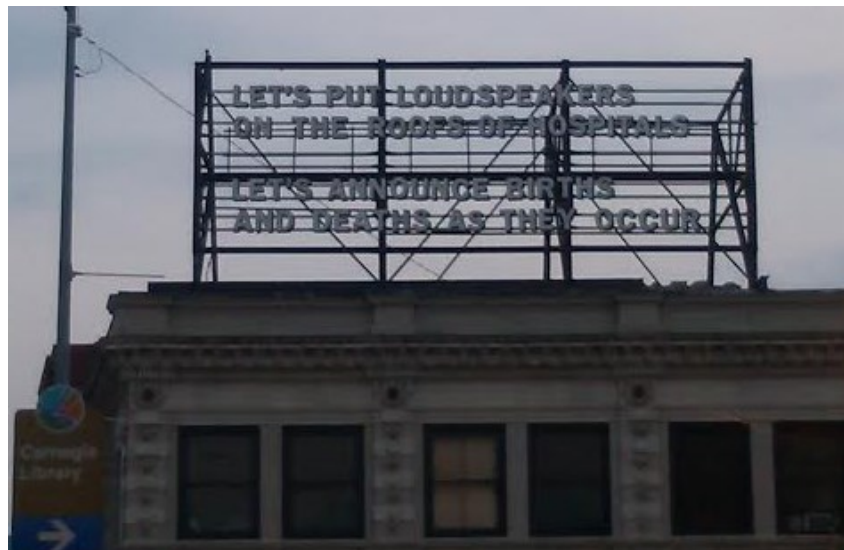
[Sign the Petition](#)

A tragic incident in Senate District 15 has prompted the introduction of SB 838. Audrie Pott, a young woman with a promising life ahead of her, was brutally raped at a high school party while in a defenseless state. The three assailants took pictures of the assault in progress and shared those pictures in an attempt to shame and bully Audrie at school. Unfortunately, just 8 days after the pictures emerged, Audrie took her own life. Since this time, the perpetrators have admitted their crimes, their identities were concealed and a criminal sentence was imposed of only 30 and 45 days of incarceration due to their juvenile status.

SB 838 would accomplish the following:

- if a juvenile is convicted of a sex crime when the victim is unconscious they would receive a minimum sentence of 2 years incarceration in a juvenile facility
- Juvenile sex crime court proceeding would be open to the public, with names able to be published in the media. This decision rests with the victim, should they want the perpetrators identity to be public.
- if a juvenile is convicted of a sex crime, and also took pictures of the crime and shared them, then this would be an enhancement to the crime, resulting in an additional sentence of up to one year, plus additional fines of up to \$10,000.

I received this petition in the spring from an organization that I have sometimes worked with before. This is one in a string of at least four similar incidents that I am aware of where a high school aged girl was incapacitated and gang raped by a group of high school boys who documented and posted pictures of the assault through social media. Audrie Pott's offenders served their 30 days of incarceration on non-consecutive weekend days.



This billboard in East Liberty rotates its messages, but typically has an interesting element of personal speech in a broadcasted format. This one reads: "Let's put loudspeakers on the roofs of hospitals. Let's announce births and deaths as they occur." The co-opting of volume reminded me of creative activism and culture jamming.



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# 1 IS 2 MANY

NEED HELP?  
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NotAlone

Watch our new PSA on campus sexual assault, featuring the President, Vice President, and actors because **1 IS 2 MANY**

Download Video: [mp4](#) (41MB)

## 1 is 2 Many

Despite the significant progress made in reducing violence against women, there is still a long way to go. Young women still face the highest rates of dating violence and sexual assault. In the last year, one in 10 teens have reported being physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend. One in five young women have been sexually assaulted while they're in college. While men comprise a smaller number of survivors, male survivors are no less important.

In response to these alarming statistics, Vice President Biden is focusing his longstanding commitment to reducing violence against women specifically on teens, students, and young women ages 16-24. The Vice President pushed for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, and he remains committed to supporting all survivors.

Vice President Biden also joined President Obama when he created the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, co-chaired by the Office of the Vice President and the Council of Women and Girls. The Task Force is releasing a new initiative, Not Alone, which provides resources to students, advocates, and universities. By targeting the importance of changing attitudes that lead to violence and educating the public on the realities of abuse, the Vice President is leading the way in an effort to stop this violence before it begins.

### 1 IN 5

YOUNG WOMEN WILL BE A VICTIM OF SEXUAL ASSAULT WHILE THEY ARE IN COLLEGE

## How Everyone Can Get Involved

*Support all survivors regardless of their gender or identity. Listen to their stories without judging or blaming. Offer to go with them to seek resources and services if they want them.*

*Speak up if you hear comments that promote violence against women. Be aware of language that you use that degrades women and survivors of other identities. Don't be afraid to be an active bystander and intervene if you believe violence is occurring and it is safe for you to do so.*

*Be a role model for healthy relationships. Always treat others with respect and expect the same from others. Mentor and teach younger people to also act as role models.*

*Join an organization that is working to end dating violence and sexual assault. Don't have one in your community? Start one!*

This amazing new campaign was recently released from the White House (!) and encourages men's involvement in sexual assault prevention. It also draws attention *away* from the victim blaming inherent in questioning the number of sexual assault victims (is it one in four or one in six or one in a hundred?) by stating firmly that *one* is too many. The campaign uses two PSAs that

feature major male film stars, sports heroes, and other cultural icons speaking out against sexual assault. Below are excited emails between Meghana and I as the campaign was breaking!

1 is 2 Many Inbox x



**Leah Boisen** [redacted]

Apr 30 ☆



to Meghana ▾

Hi Meghana!

I hope you're well and not too crazy with finals time! I thought of you when i just saw [the new PSA](#) from the Whitehouse. I'm sure you've probably already seen it but i just wanted to pass along as it reminded me of your work!

It's been great going through these transcripts (also intense!) and writing up the results - i can't wait to see the completed shape they'll take. I also got a dissertation defense scheduled for July 28th, so that is exciting news! I'll be doing a kind of interactive art exhibit in the space before i defend showcasing some of Hannah and Rebecca and my other participants' art work, screencaps of the Playboy and Pink Loves Consent jams, and other material i've encountered while doing this work (including some pictures of local jamming work around Pittsburgh!). If there's anything to represent you or SAPAC in the space i'd love to share it! Perhaps an Ask Me About My Beard shirt? ;)

I hope you're doing well and thanks so much again for your participation - it's really great to have your voice in there!

Best,  
Leah



**Meghana Kulkarni**

Apr 30 ☆



to me ▾

Hi Leah!

I was so excited to see this campaign :) I may have done a little happy dance when I saw it at work haha.

Good to hear that your dissertation is going well-the interactive part of it sounds amazing and I'd love to send something your way. How would I go about doing that?

Thanks again for including me in the discussion-I still look back on it as a wonderful experience.

\*\*\*

Page 2 of about 21,500,000 results (30 seconds)

**An Alpha Dad's Letter To All The "Elliot Rodgers" Out There ...**

[townhall.com/.../an-alpha-dads-letter-to-all-the-elliott-rodg...](#) ▾ Townhall.com ▾

1 day ago - In the event that there are more Elliot Rodgers out there that are ready to snap because girls way out of your league won't respond to your ...

**Elliot Rodger's Isla Vista Rampage Sparks Push For Gun ...**

[www.nbcnews.com/.../elliott-rodgers-isla-vista-rampage-sp...](#) ▾ NBCNews.com ▾

4 days ago - Few states have stricter gun laws than California, but those restrictions did nothing to prevent a troubled young man's deadly rampage in the ...

**California Police Knew Of Elliot Rodger's Disturbing Videos ...**



[www.ibtimes.com/california-police-...](#) ▾ International Business Times ▾

by Suman Varandani - in 39 Google+ circles

3 days ago - Police officials found out about Elliot Rodger's final video and his 140-page manifesto about an hour after the shootings.

**Elliot Rodger's Previous Attacks on Women, Couples - Yahoo**

[gma.yahoo.com/elliott-rodgers-previous-attacks-...](#) ▾ Good Morning America ▾

6 days ago - Elliot Rodger's rage-filled manifesto documents his growing fury with the world and his initial attacks on women and couples that he envied.

**Elliot Rodger's Disturbing Mental Illnesses: Mom Also ...**

[hollywoodlife.com/.../elliott-rodgers-disturbing-mental-ill...](#) ▾ Hollywood Life ▾

5 days ago - Is it possible that Elliot Rodger was autistic? According to court documents from his parents divorce in 1999, his mother, Li Chin Rodger, ...

After spending a couple hours wading through the news coverage on the Elliot Rodgers case for something appropriate to include here, I ultimately decided to just screenshot some of the search results to demonstrate the sheer amount of coverage and summarize the case myself. Rodgers was a young man who killed six people, including himself, after posting a manifesto and video tirade to

YouTube about a coming "Day of Retribution" for all the women who had sexually or romantically rejected him. Rodgers then killed his three roommates, left their shared apartment, opened fire on a sorority house (killing two) and killed himself. Despite the fact that both the video and manifesto were entirely riddled with misogynist vitriol, the obvious response to characterize these events as sexist has received a remarkably stifling response.

Many of the articles linked from the initial pages of search results talk about how the killings were not motivated by sexism since more men were killed than women (Rodgers and his three roommates were male) and dismiss those who are obviously concerned that a young man took a gun to a sorority house to "punish" women for not having sex with him. Media coverage has also quickly shifted to talking about Rodgers' mental health and depicting his actions as the result of an individual mental illness, despite the fact that his well published materials all point to deeply held sexist beliefs and a sense of entitlement to women and women's bodies. Most disturbingly, many responses are *tips for picking up women* or other pieces that seem to shockingly accept Rodgers' premise that women owe sex to men or that being frustrated by women is enough to drive one to spree killing.

This event was obviously upsetting to me. However it was even more unsettling to see that even this egregious evidence of our patriarchal culture – where a man posts a video verbally attacking women and announcing his plans to kill them for not having sex with him, *and then does* – was not cause for cultural concern or recognition from the mainstream media of a deep problem with the way we set up dating ideals and relationships between men and women. Rather, the Rodgers case has largely been cast as an individual issue, or, disgustingly, used to further talk about how there is not enough focus or attention given to the suffering men face by not being allowed unfettered access to women.



Because I can't run on the airline trail alone without a can of mace and a family member waiting for me at the end [#YesAllWomen](#)

Expand

Reply Retweet Favorite More



[#yesallwomen](#)- As a woman, fear is part of my reality [strib.mn/1u6b0df](#)

View summary

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Why was I, at the age of 12, taught to never put my drink down at a party but people weren't taught not to drug someone [#YesAllWomen](#)

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"Men were surprised by [#YesAllWomen](#) because men don't see what women experience." [slate.com/articles/doubl...](#)

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### Why Men Don't See the Harassment Women Experience. Yes, All Women.

When Santa Barbara police arrived at Elliot Rodger's apartment last month—after Rodger's mother alerted authorities to her son's YouTube videos, where he expressed his resentment of women who don't...

[View on web](#)





Because I heard my friend recount a time when she was roofied at a bar, and I cried while apologizing for her experience. [#YesAllWomen](#)

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[#yesallwomen](#) because we're taught to strive to have successful marriages, and men are taught to have successful jobs.

Expand

Reply Retweet Favorite More



By saying "not all men" you put the safety of females at a less important rank than the embarrassment of your gender. [#yesallwomen](#)

Expand

Reply Retweet Favorite More



A man on the street told me I needed to cover up cause I was making him think impure thoughts. I was wearing a t-shirt & jeans. [#yesallwomen](#)

Expand

Reply Retweet Favorite More



Because "cool story babe, now make me a sandwich" shirt doesn't break the school dress code but a girl's bra strap does... [#yesallwomen](#)

Expand

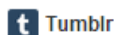
Reply Retweet Favorite More



Because it's no longer damned if you do, damned if you don't. It's dead if you do, dead if you don't. [#yesallwomen](#) [ow.ly/xsqy3](http://ow.ly/xsqy3)

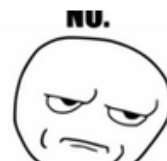
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Reply Retweet Favorite More



We're collecting stories of violence inflicted on women who reject sexual advances. Share yours here.

[View on web](#)



[#yesallwomen](#) because I get more hate and looks for wearing shorts than men get from each other for sexual assault

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Reply Retweet Favorite More



These are a selection of just the most recent tweets I could pull using the hashtag #yesallwomen.

Partly due to gender dichotomous debates that sparked from the Elliot Rodgers case, women became frustrated that any writing about anger at the actions of men was quickly derailed with defensive responses of “Not all men!” #yesallwomen is a response, and an attempt to demonstrate to men the daily ways in which women suffer. The fundamental point made is that though not all men may be perpetrators of violence, all women at some point in their lives feel violated by men



This is a stop sign at the end of my street – Penn and 40<sup>th</sup> – which someone jammed. It made me smile.

### **Results 3: Conclusion and implications (or perhaps: queries and indictments)**

*“In a small room where people unanimously maintain a conspiracy of silence, one word of truth sounds like a pistol shot.” - Czeslaw Milosz, Noble laureate (cited in Lasn, 2000, p. 109)*

How then, are we called to respond to what has unfolded over these pages? How do *I* respond, as the researcher? As a feminist theorist, a clinician, a psychologist, a woman, and an activist? Having detailed a culture in which sexism exists at every level in insidious and seemingly innocuous ways, found hope in a set of concepts that may combat and heal that sexism, and explored a brave new form of activism which might be just what the doctor ordered, how can I conclude and what do I have to say about this data – these narratives, these actions, these lives? More importantly, what do I feel it is saying through me, and what does it say about us, as citizens and clinicians sharing a world with these women?

This chapter aims to situate the research results within the field of clinical psychology and demonstrate how psychology can learn from and utilize the insights of culture jammers both outside and within the therapy room. Drawing dynamic parallels between accounts of captive trauma and the daily suffering of women, I will also gesture towards a culture of microtraumatization, and explore how insights from trauma researchers with regards to working with trauma support the research findings here.

While addressing the limitations of culture jamming, the potential pitfalls of using the medicalizing metaphor of sickness, and the inherent danger in decisions of any sort, I will nevertheless advocate for creative activism as a reparative measure not only for the culture, but for

individuals as well. I will conclude with suggestions for how clinicians may incorporate my findings into their clinical work, as well as into their identities as clinicians and advocates for those who suffer.

***The psychological landscape: Appreciating the true nature of culture/individual***

*“Do therapists ever ask their patients how they vote?” - Michael Ventura (1992, p. 216)*

What is required of us first and foremost — as clinicians, as psychologists, as researchers, and as advocates — is that we truly understand and appreciate the depth of relation between individual and environment, and we open our eyes to how profoundly toxic our environment has become. As reviewed in the introductory chapters, even the most holistic branches of psychotherapy still too often treat culture as “indigenous ‘clothing’ that covers the universal human” rather than “an integral part of each individual’s psychological flesh and bones” (Cushman, 1995, p. 18).

As my research supports, women continue to feel silenced, isolated, powerless, and erased in major ways in society. If we as therapists fail to understand how profoundly an environment of degrading, everyday sexism affects our female clients, we *cannot*, by this very exclusion, properly treat them. We have not only failed to see a massive component of their fundamental being by ignoring cultural components, but often, we also fail to recognize how truly steeped in sexism our culture is.

Unfortunately many of the positive social changes achieved by feminists have had the unintended effect of settling a false calm over our society, even in liberal and progressive circles.

We have feminism, it's been working, there's a historical record of change, so now we feel content to simply acknowledge that, and rest on our heels. However, while feminism has done much to combat the corrosive effects of patriarchy, it has not ended sexism in our society, and it is not a sufficient measure to continue to stem the tide.

My suggestion is that culture jamming may act as a helpful therapeutic adjunctive at both the individual and cultural levels, and that it interrogates the very nature of these inner and outer boundaries by working at and through both levels at once. The following section will re-engage some of the theory presented at the outset of this dissertation and demonstrate how culture jamming may constitute a form of discursive resistance (a la Foucault) as well as a cultural and individual therapeutic.

*Creative activism as cultural resistance: Waging discursive warfare*

*"Noise is relative to the silence preceding it. The more absolute the hush, the more shocking the thunderclap. Our masters have not heard the people's voice for generations, Evey. And it is much, much louder than they care to remember." - V for Vendetta (Moore & Lloyd, 1988)*

While I have mainly focused on how culture jamming represents a cultural and individual therapeutic through the experiential axes of my participants, I would like to return to some of the more theoretical underpinnings of culture jamming. Re-engaging the social constructionist and discursive view outlined in the introductory chapters, how does culture jamming fit in with the

work of Foucault, Althusser, or Butler in terms of discursive resistance and appropriation of new identities? In this section, I will briefly address how creative activism functions at the theoretical level by interpellating subjects in new ways, resisting normative subjection, and working within discourse to shift and expose hidden power.

Recalling Althusser, interpellation is a practice wherein “a subject is constituted by being hailed, addressed, named” (Butler, 1997, p. 95) and thus brought into a certain kind of being. Further, Althusser (1970) reminds us that this naming is never benign, or apolitical, but that “the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing” (p. 49). That is, we both construct ideology and create ideological subjects of discourse out of each other through the daily process of interpellation.

As I have argued, the current way in which our culture interpellates women is pathological and, I will suggest in the coming section, bears disturbing structural similarities to the victim/perpetrator dynamics found in instances captive trauma. Part of the efficacy of culture jamming is that it interrupts some of the common and damaging interpellations given to women, and it also interpellates female subjectivity differently.

If we think of the BJTWYA project, for instance, Lillian’s flyers literally stand in the way of magazine covers which seek to interpellate women in certain ways – to call to them as self-monitoring subjects, as sexual partners trying to please their men, or as body-objects. Not only does Lillian’s action silence a damaging call, it puts a surprising and much less frequent one in its place, interpellating the female who views it as beautiful, acceptable, and sufficient, just as she is.

Operation Beautiful similarly acts as an interrupter into female consciousness and seeks to interpellate the female subject in a novel way. As Fredrickson, Roberts, and other feminist researchers working with objectification reveal, the experience of being looked at, or looking at

oneself, is often a negative and objectifying experience for many women. Placing a note in that space of the mirror that reads, “you are beautiful” thus calls the woman who sees it to embody a different subject position, and to see herself differently than she typically might. If interpellation is a crucial part of sustaining harmful discourses, then creative activism may be highly effective at changing cultural discourse (and thus acting as a cultural therapeutic) by interpellating women in different ways.

Exploring how we are ever able to change dominant structures of power, Butler (1997) holds hope that by resisting normative subjection, or refusing to be constituted in precisely the ways the dominant culture demands, we might begin to change the discursive demands placed on us. This may not necessarily mean we reject the terms of discourse, as Butler notes that “only by occupying – being occupied by – that injurious term can I resist and oppose it, recasting the power that constitutes me as the power I oppose” (p. 104). Butler points to the need to resignify discursive practices, and construct new meanings *through* discourse and the given tools of culture: precisely the objective of culture jamming.

Jammers like FORCE literalize Butler’s sense of “occupying” an injurious site when they actually pretend to be an offending company. Rather than fight from the outside against damaging companies and the ways in which they seek to subject women, Hannah and Rebecca’s work uses the very same tools, strategies, images, and language of Victoria’s Secret (or Playboy) in order to recast the power dynamics at play. No longer are they passive participants in a discourse, but, by highlighting the way in which Victoria’s Secret *could* (but isn’t) positioning women, FORCE exposes the way that Victoria’s Secret currently *is* constituting women, and the powerful implications behind constructing women as sexual objects.

By using the discourse and images of mainstream culture, culture jamming is able to work within, and expose the vulnerability of, normative discourses. Butler (1997) writes that “the uses to which a given sign is originally put are ‘worlds apart’ from the uses to which it then becomes available” (p. 94), and jammers take advantage of this weakness within the sign by corrupting and exposing discourse’s powerful implications. Though Playboy’s Top Ten list every year was never *meant* to highlight consent themed activities, it is nevertheless able to be used as such. The fact that Playboy’s list has so historically endorsed schools where high profile rape cases unfold makes it a *particularly* ripe symbol for re-appropriation and re-signification, which FORCE obviously capitalizes upon.

Foucault (1983a) writes: “Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are... to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us” (p. 220). At its most basic, culture jamming is a refusal to participate – just as Hannah recounts seeing “a hole in the system” (HB8) that she wanted to enlarge, jammers are able to see and to in various ways refuse some of the claims being forced upon them. Just by acting, creative activists rupture the passive reception of discourse that is crucial to unproblematic discursive proliferation. By resisting discourses of normalization, highlighting invisible power dynamics, and calling forth new interpellations, culture jammers shed light on the destructive (but often invisible) ways in which our culture works on women’s psyches. They also enable new performances of identity to be called into being, and model the possibility of resistance.

If cultures can be sick, and infect the individuals within them with harmful discourses, then cultural therapeutics must aim to change the discourse in order to change the cultural context. Again, we see that sometimes just as a virus is precisely what is needed to heal the body, and to

give it a crucial new capability, so might a booster of culture jamming be exactly what our society needs. We can only expect changes at the broad levels of society if we forge new identities and new ways in which to subject ourselves. As my participants called for greater public recognition, and more alternative images and models, so do the key theorists I am employing in this research affirm that an awareness of the role of discourse and new discursive possibilities are needed to begin to restructure power differentials in society.

*Understanding women's suffering: Towards a theory of microtraumatization*

*"It's hard to know if you're crazy if you feel you're in danger all the time now" - Jenny Holzer*

As I conclude this research, I was surprised to find myself pulled towards some of the literature of trauma; particularly captive trauma and specifically, Judith Herman's seminal text, *Trauma and Recovery*. Using insights from trauma research to draw comparisons between the relational and intra-psychic dynamics of victims of captive trauma and the experiences outlined by my participants of living within a patriarchal culture, I will finally propose a twofold view of trauma that pays respect to the discursive constitution of the person. In addition to recognizing macro traumas such as domestic violence or sexual assault, I suggest that if we take seriously the role of discourse and culture in individual constitution, as well as the pathological effect of patriarchal discourse, then we must also recognize a level of daily, or microtraumatization that occurs as the result of such a culture.

Before diving into further comparisons and linkages, I would like to pause here to



comment on the nature of the trauma metaphor, and specifically the victim-perpetrator metaphor which I will presently engage. It is not at all my intention here to *equate* micro and macro traumas or to suggest that horrifying traumas such as torture or imprisonment are the same as living within a sexist culture. Such an equation would be not only inaccurate, but disrespectful to the victims of traumas which break all our understandings, and which defy all our insights and attempts at healing. Clearly, the affective and phenomenological experiences of captive trauma and living in a culture of daily sexism are incredibly different, and the pain and suffering produced by these situations, miles apart.

However, given that these two situations are so extremely different, we should expect to see virtually *no* similarities between them, in any way. Given how disparate the circumstances and experiences of the political prisoner and the women living in the contemporary U.S. are, they should bear no real commonality whatsoever... and yet they seem to. Part of why the literature on captive trauma intrigued me so much when theorizing the effects of a cultural sickness of patriarchy is that many of the dynamics that researchers identify as taking place in the situation of captive trauma – particularly a volatile and unpredictable environment, a hopeless sense of inevitability, a restriction in the field of initiative, and an internalization of a powerful other's demands and preferences – seem to also take place (albeit to an a far less extreme) in the situation of women living captive in a damaging, or sick culture.

Again it is not my intention to *compare* or to equate these experiences but to point out that some dynamic parallels exist when ideally, we should see none at all. That I am able to read accounts of trauma and not only resonate with certain experiences, but also find direct links to the words of my participants – “no end in sight” – is highly disturbing. As a well educated, privileged, young white woman living in the United States I should see essentially no similarities between my

experiences, or the experiences of my peers and participants, and those of kidnapping victims. On the face of it, there could be no two more dissimilar sets of experiences... and yet, I *did* find these links, and did feel an unsettling sense of resonance. With no desire to downplay or disrespect the seriousness of what we traditionally call traumas (and what I will call macro trauma), I will suggest that in addition to these kinds of trauma, we as clinicians should also recognize the existence of microtraumas.

Though obviously risky (here I am again, trapped within my own language!), I have chosen to use the language of *microtraumas* here, rather than micro-inequities, or micro-stressors, because of the parallel dynamics (which I will presently detail) between the captive trauma situation and the situation of women living a patriarchal culture, and to suggest the serious nature of these microtraumas. Again, this is not meant as a suggestion that microtraumas are *just as* traumatizing as macro traumas, or experienced in the same way, but points to the way that both situations may evoke similar patterns of response from patients, albeit on a very different scale. This language choice is also meant to convey the profound effect that the accumulation of microtraumatic events can have on women, and to alert clinicians to ways of conceptualizing these events that might fit broadly within the way we already think about trauma.

It is these similar patterns of response – a sense of hopelessness, a dampening of initiative, and an internalized sense of powerlessness with regard to a powerful other – that I believe find natural translation in our female patients as the depression, anxiety, and disordered eating we so commonly see. My argument is that these illnesses are not really local to the individual woman, but in fact a social inheritance made sensible when we understand how women are trapped within a sick a damaging culture with no escape... or end in sight.

It is also the case that in speaking of trauma, and of victims and perpetrators, I not only

tumble into a discursive history of trauma, but of the subject positions implied by the terms ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator.’ It is certainly not my intent to portray all women as victims in the sense of weakness or powerlessness, and it is also not my intent to vilify men, or to portray all men as potentially volatile. However – as I have argued through my data as well as introductory chapters – volatility *is* many women’s experience of many men, and financial inequality, media portrayal, sexual scripts, and actual legal statutes all prime the relationship between men and women to be a socially hostile one.

Since men hold more social power, and since this is obvious to women, women are set in a position of need, placed in a kind of “economic, social, psychological, and legal subordination” (Herman, 1997, p. 74) to men. This means that women act in a landscape where appealing to or appeasing men has often become so much a part of the feminine psyche that we fail to even notice how much we adjust our expectations or behavior in order to be safe from, explain ourselves to, win the approval of, or placate men. This invisibility, of course, is always how discourse functions; but when the implied power differentials of discourse are so severe, we might say that this constitutes a sick culture, and that the constant accumulation of these adjustments and accommodations constitutes a kind of microtraumatization, in which women internalize a powerful male Other and act in accordance to maintain their basic sense of psychic (and actual) safety.

This appeal to men was admittedly unsettling to me in some of my participants’ accounts when they spoke about the need to ‘include’ men in advocacy work, particularly sexual assault advocacy. Part of me feels ready to agree — of course rigid gender constructs hurt men too, and of course men can serve as crucial allies in combating violence against women. The issue is complicated, of course, because most perpetrators of violence against women *are* men. On the one

hand, this puts men in a unique position to speak to peer members of their group in different and more effective ways than those outside the group (such as women) might be able to, and in this way, men can of course be very helpful allies.

Yet there is something in the way that some participants spoke about *soliciting* men that bore a disconcerting resemblance to a kind of victim-perpetrator bargaining. At times during my interviews I was disheartened by what felt like a strange negotiation: a sense that if we could just deliver the message in just the right way — at a football game, with buffalo wings, or in a Playboy column — or if we could just ask in the *best way possible*, then maybe men would please stop raping us.

Of the major criticisms of feminism put forth by my participants, the most significant were that the movement excludes men, and that feminists are too angry and aggressive. But is there not a single space, not even feminism — designed specifically to help women heal, often directly from the actions of men — where we don't have to include men? Is there no place anymore where anger against men can be justified? Does this not constitute a kind of “psychological domination” (Herman, 1997, p. 76) which is so profoundly harmful for victims of trauma?

While it may be pragmatic to actively strive to translate feminist issues for men and work to solicit their attention, it is also concerning to me how this might replicate the same fundamental structure of the disempowered struggling to appeal to those in power, rather than more foundationally unsettling corrupted and unequal power distributions. Again we see the recurrent tension that occurs throughout this dissertation — *can* we use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house?

To be clear — I do believe that men can play an important role in feminism and in healing our culture from sexism. One of my dearest friends, and best loved academic collaborators, who

actively helped with many theoretical parts of this project, is the public enemy number one depicted here: a young, straight, white man. He is one of the finest feminists I know, and I have no doubt that his voice will change many men's lives in ways that I could not hope to. Of course both men and women function as unique individuals and are capable of enacting many different subjectivities.

At the same time, 'men' as a social category of people *do* have more power than women and *have* historically used that power to subjugate and oppress women. While certainly there are men that are conscious of and combat these inequalities, and there are many women who have may not have been victimized by men, as gendered categories there are truths that cannot be denied. In using the metaphor of victim and perpetrator, it is not my intention to portray all women as victims and all men as perpetrators — either conceptually or actually — as such a comparison would be oversimplistic, and unfounded. Rather, this section seeks to explore how the daily position many women find themselves can be dynamically similar in some ways to that of victims of captive trauma, though obviously to a much less extreme end. These similarities are drawn with no intent to debase any group of people — trauma victims or men — but rather to point to how trauma research supports and affirms the research findings here.

Though the levels of macro and micro trauma I am proposing are obviously very different experientially, they may be structurally similar in some alarming ways. Further, a Foucauldian view of power reminds us of the different, but interlocking, natures of disciplinary power and power enacted through violence or force. That is, though both are kinds of power, violence is used as a tool of social control only when more subtle practices of disciplinary power have failed. In this view, rape is only needed to terrorize women when they have been insufficiently subordinated by discursive subjection and internalization. Yet in our culture we see *both* these kinds of power being

routinely wielded against women, the damaging result of which is unfortunately still minimized or downplayed.

While I argue that the constant interactions with hopelessness, vulnerability, and powerlessness women are forced into vis-à-vis their daily experiences constitute a culture of microtraumatization, we should also remember the frequency of macro traumas in the everyday lives of women. Though these levels of trauma are quite different, then, there is also some slippage, or overlay between them, and the distance between a culture that subtly sexualizes and objectifies its women may not, in truth, be so far from becoming the society that overtly violates and kills its women. I believe this slippage is possible because there *do* exist some structural similarities between the two seemingly disparate experiences of prolonged trauma and living within a patriarchal culture, even as they appear worlds apart.

Drawing connections between combat trauma, domestic abuse, and rape, Judith Herman comprehensively works through much of the contemporary canon of trauma research, offering incisive descriptions and resultant suggestions for healing from or working through trauma.<sup>4</sup> Particularly illuminating in the context of this project are Herman's comments on prolonged and repeated, or captive trauma, and how such trauma produces different effects from a single traumatic event. Though Herman is writing specifically about situations of captivity, such as kidnapping, political imprisonment, or women held captive in abusive interpersonal relationships, these accounts have fascinating – and chilling – dynamic parallels to the ways in which women are held hostage within a hostile culture.

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<sup>4</sup> Ah, here I am, trapped again! What would Hillman and Ventura (1992) say of this language? Am I not encouraging the very 'processing' that they so criticize in therapy, or worse, somehow suggesting that traumas – especially those unbearable macro traumas – might be alchemized and transformed, oh, that psychic lead into new spun gold? I hope not. My suggestion is not that trauma or sickness – individual or cultural, macro or micro – should be gotten over, but that for those who seek alleviation from suffering, there might be some ways in which they could experience more freedom or movement within their lives (a sense of therapeutic healing).

Again, my intention is not to equate these different planes of experience, or to say that the experience of living in our culture is necessarily traumatic in the same way we typically conceptualize trauma, but to explore what parallels may exist, and to see if the terms and the research of trauma has something to offer a conception of patriarchal cultural sickness. Harkening back to the Method chapter, my quest here is not for definitive answers or settled meanings, but new conversations and connections. Might these two disparate experiences of being a victim of prolonged trauma and being a citizen of a sick culture be connected in ways that would be helpful for therapists to further explore?

Pointing to the systemic erasure of women's suffering, Herman (1997) describes the "domestic captivity" of women, writing: "Political captivity is generally recognized, whereas the domestic captivity of women and children is often unseen." (p. 74). While Herman is writing specifically about women trapped in households with abusive husbands or boyfriends, the structural erasure of this macro instance of traumatization only further highlights the microtraumatization that occurs when we more generally silence and erase women's suffering. We have only recently come to legally acknowledge marital rape, and structurally our society still has precious few ways of talking about the fact that so many women are held prisoner in their homes, and beaten by men who purport to love them. If this is true, and we cannot even begin to acknowledge and recognize this *violent* kind of domestic captivity, then the more general domestic captivity of women within a patriarchal society is certainly rendered invisible, though it is also extremely damaging.

Because the cultural situation women find themselves in is inescapable (it literally surrounds us at every turn), there is a kind of acquiescence – sometimes talked about as inevitability by my participants. Because of a sense inevitability and erasure, women learn to

adjust and appeal to men, as has already been discussed. Again, we find disturbingly similarities to descriptions of the situation of captive trauma as Herman (1997) writes that “the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator” (p. 75).

When my participants talk about feeling unsafe walking home alone at night, or needing to package things in just the right way in order to appeal to men, we can see how women’s psychology is fundamentally and profoundly shaped by the actions and beliefs of men. Though this is obviously very different than the way in which the kidnapping victim’s psyche is shaped by the kidnapper, in both instances one is made to feel powerless, helpless, and reliant on a more powerful (and abusive) other. While the situation of the kidnapping is quite literal, and the situation of women held captive by patriarchy more abstract, it is the structural dynamics – not the experience or suffering – which is strikingly similar.

Rowe’s (1990) explication of micro-inequities also highlights that these “tiny, damaging” instances of subjugation only occur to those who are “not indigenous” (p. 157) in a given environment. Because women live in a patriarchal society where men hold the power to make and change rules, women are placed daily in a subordinate position to men through a number of tiny – but extremely damaging – instances of sexualization and objectification (which always carry with them some level of threat or violence).

For their survival, victims of prolonged trauma learn to appeal to powerful perpetrators, and to internalize the demands and preferences of perpetrators; this kind of internalized perpetrator figure also seems to be present in the way that many women speak about, and foreground ‘men’ as a general category. Butler (1997) writes, “power not only produces the boundaries of a subject but pervades the interiority of that subject” (p. 89) and feminist theorists have wrote at length about the



interior colonization of women by men, not only physically through rape, but psychically (Ruth, 1998). The constant adjustment of one's own behavior and psychic life in accordance with the internalized power of patriarchy – as acted out by, or overlaid onto, individual men – then becomes so much a part of women's daily lives that we fail to even notice it.

The “systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma” (Herman, 1997, p. 77) is incredibly damaging and is, in part, what makes the effects of captive trauma so severe. Those who cannot escape their abusers – due to domestic or political captivity, or imprisonment – are subject to ongoing traumatization, the effects of which accrue to devastating ends. Again, while the traumas suffered are of very different kinds, I argue that women also undergo a “systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma” (Herman, 1997, p. 77) via the dozens of micro instances that I have already detailed in my participants' accounts, as well as in the introductory chapters.

When a man on the street tells a woman to smile, it is not merely an annoyance, or an irritation, but an injurious interpellation, and one that the woman in society can neither avoid nor escape. No matter where she goes, or who she interacts with, the woman in society is consistently reminded of her role as a sexual object, and her vulnerability to violence. Not only do damaging discursive messages come to women through ever more panoptic media – which infiltrates every facet of life – women are subject to sexualization from friends, and strangers, and even taught to be most cautious of violence from those who they know: family members, or dates.

These subtle and damaging reminders are in fact strategic exercises in power, which “although unique for each individual [are] still remarkably similar” (Walker, 1979, p. 76) in the effect produced. Not only do women internalize a sense of threat and vulnerability from a hostile culture, they also become disconnected from each other, as we have already seen. In cases of

captive trauma, Herman (1997) writes that the perpetrator seeks to “destroy the victim’s sense of self in relation to others” (p. 77), or to isolate the victim from the ability to relate to others or to the world meaningfully.

When my participants criticized feminism so heavily – and perhaps, quite reasonably – I have to wonder if this bad reputation is not simply part of the discursive function of patriarchy, and yet another way to isolate women from each other; to keep them from sharing, connecting, changing discourse, or doing anything at all that would upset the status quo. By attacking feminism, or by generally silencing and erasing women, our culture works to dynamically suppress women talking to each other about a number of valid and gender-based concerns. Similarly, by encouraging women to adopt an internal, objectifying view, (a la Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and to fear threat of sexual assault from even their cousins, stepbrothers, or high school dates, our culture works to destroy women’s sense of themselves in relation to others. Again, while what is done to sever this link is quite different, and the capacity for victims of captive trauma versus microtraumatization to regain relation to themselves or others may be very different as well, there is a dynamic or structural similarity it seems, even between these vastly different experiences.

In cases of prolonged trauma, “fear is also increased by inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence and capricious enforcement of petty rules” (Herman, 1997, p. 77). In the traditional view of trauma, this unpredictability refers to the normally calm and controlling father who suddenly strikes out with a fist, or the tiny infraction by the prisoner that earns an egregiously disproportionate punishment. However, this landscape of “inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence” is also differently true of the cultural context in which women live, where violence is a constant threatening hum in the background. Not only do most women come to know

or discover that there are many women in their lives who have been victims of violence, we are also constantly reminded through media of the persistent but in some ways seemingly random violence against women (as some of the material in the Intersections demonstrate, even during the writing of this research I was reminded several times that women can be and are raped and killed with seemingly no justification or prediction).

Further, the rules and social standards for women's bodies and behaviors are constantly shifting, making the social landscape itself a volatile and unpredictable one for many women. Even as we gain in some areas, we are pushed back in others, and it is often unclear to women how we can expect to be assessed from one environment to another. During our interview, Lillian told a story of two women she was speaking with who were students at Wellesley (a women's college) and were struggling to try and reconcile the vastly disparate expectations and roles they were expected to juggle. On campus, they felt respected and enriched as academic equals, but when they ventured out into the greater Boston area to try and meet men, they felt thrown and confused, like "we suddenly have to become these sexual objects" (LH32). This inconsistency is maddening – and I believe in some ways, traumatizing – and women develop ever more prolific splits as they are interpellated as sexual objects, sometimes in the most surprising ways and places.

I think here of a personal anecdote. My sister is one of the most powerful, intelligent, and incredibly hard working women I know; she has worked internationally as a corporate lawyer and negotiated contracts, mergers and securities issuances for some of the largest corporations in the world, graduating at the top of her class and gaining immediate placement in one of the most powerful law firms in the country. She is a force.

And yet I can also remember carrying groceries with this same woman when some boy, probably no more than 18, hollered at her from his car window, commenting on her "fine ass." I

remember the exasperated and bewildered look on her face — this was far from the first time this had happened to either of us — as she threw up her hands and shook her head: “I don’t get it! It doesn’t even matter what I wear! Look at this, I’m in sweatpants! I haven’t even showered!”

How do we expect women to live like this? How can one person hold so many radically different subjectivities within herself, particularly when women so often lack community that might serve as “a synthesizing context [to] mediate the estrangement of such a divided existence” (Sipiora, 2014, p. 6)? Every time a man sexualizes a woman on the street with a comment, or a touch — an act that has happened to every woman I know, usually many times a week — this serves as the “capricious enforcement of petty rules” that Herman describes: it is a reminder of women’s subordinate status, nothing less.

Of course this goes directly back to Fredrickson and Roberts’ (1997) work with objectification theory, and to their suggestion that the constant intrusions into female consciousness accumulate to a degrading and damaging effect. Fredrickson and Roberts persuasively argue for how this ongoing objectification – and, we might add, interpellation of women into sexualized subjects – leads to the mental illnesses we see most commonly in women. We could also point out, however, how these ongoing instances of objectification constitute an illness in themselves.

The effects for children growing up in volatile and unpredictable households are clear (and tragic) so what of women growing up in a volatile and unpredictable culture? Because sexual assault is so frankly common in our culture, rape appears to women as an unpredictable act of violence – it could occur at any time, and be perpetrated not just by strangers but by friends, partners, or even family members. The inability to predict and control where they are vulnerable is in itself extremely damaging for women, who often simply inculcate a sense of constant

vulnerability in order to err on the safe side.

Herman writes that the aim of a perpetrator is not only to instill fear of violence or death in the victim, “but also gratitude for being allowed to live” (p. 77). This gratitude is a sentiment we unfortunately hear echoed in so many women’s accounts when they say they are ‘lucky’ to live in a neighborhood where they can walk home at night, or ‘lucky’ to work in a department where their input is valued equally to their male peers. Of course these are rights, not fortunes, and it is only in a culture where the subjugation of women is normalized that they appear otherwise. While danger and hard work are natural parts of life, their discriminating effects on women is social, not natural, and the appreciation women are encouraged to feel for their basic safety is evidence of how deeply our culture instills fear into female consciousness.

When Meghana says that she considers herself “a very privileged person” because she has never been raped, we hear a gratitude that no woman should ever have to feel. And Meghana is certainly not alone — just the other day in a group of a female friends, one of my colleagues began a sentence, “well, we all know...” only to break off and look at me, startled, saying, “oh that’s right! I forget *you* haven’t ever been sexually assaulted, wow, that’s crazy.” Of course it is not. It is only crazy for a woman to *not* have been sexually assaulted in a society of commonplace traumatization where even “rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are so common a part of women’s life that they can hardly be described as outside the range of ordinary experience” (Herman, 1997, p. 33).

Even though we as psychologists recognize these macro forms of trauma – rape, battery, assault – we typically fail to see how the incredibly common nature of these attacks, and the fact that essentially every woman knows one or more victims, constitutes a kind of traumatic knowledge in itself. And, if we take Foucault’s (1975) insight that there is no knowledge which

“does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27) then we must think about how the knowledge of constant vulnerability affects women’s lives and possibilities.

Returning to captive trauma, Herman (1997) writes that “the perpetrator seeks to destroy the victim’s sense of autonomy ... by scrutiny and control of the victim’s body” (p. 77). Again, in the cases Herman and the clinicians she cites are referring to, this scrutiny and control is literal and physical – the body is imprisoned, strapped down, or otherwise controlled. Yet, understanding power as twofold, there is also a way in which disciplinary and discursive power also destroys women’s sense of autonomy, through different means of scrutiny and control over the body.

Indeed, Foucault’s (1976) conception of biopower specifically locates the body as a central site on which power acts, and a primary target power seeks to tame and manage through discourse. The body must be brought under control, harnessed, and normalized through surveillance if disciplinary power is to truly take root in the individual. Of course we know that women’s bodies are highly controlled in our society – not only through the accumulation of a thousand conflicting messages sent through every advertisement, magazine cover, website, TV show, movie, and indeed, *every* form of media – but through legislation, and, again, through the interpellations of others. By early adolescence, girls have already firmly grasped the message that their bodies are constantly being watched and evaluated (Ward, & Rivadeneyra, 1999) and this scrutiny divorces women from a sense of autonomy, or a freedom to do or look as they wish.

Again, we also need look no further than objectification theory, and to Fredrickson and Roberts’ (1997) sensitive analysis about how women’s power — relationally and economically — is often determined by their ability to conform to body and beauty expectations presented through the media. Women internalize a knowledge that standards for how they should look are not set by them, but by media and by other people. This knowledge then erodes a sense of autonomy, or self

determination, beginning at the level of the body (as I first discovered with my patients). Further, as Fredrickson and Roberts posit, the knowledge of a constant, objectifying gaze reduces women's internal bodily awareness, often literally separating them from a sense of themselves as embodied people. Though of course the loss of autonomy and separation from self experienced by the macro trauma victim and the woman in society are different, there are some interesting parallels in these different exercises of power.

Lastly from the field of trauma, Herman (1997) points to the well known fact that “perpetrators universally seek to isolate their victims from any other source of information, material aid, or emotional support” (p. 79) — a facet of women's daily experience that has hopefully by now already been made abundantly clear. Women in our culture far too frequently feel cut off from each other, from feminist ideology, or from a community of support that would help them to make sense of their experiences within a larger sociopolitical context. In this way, women are often isolated from the possibility of change, leading to the sense of inevitability endorsed by my participants.

Herman (1997) describes how victims of captive trauma also experience a sense of inevitability resulting from isolation. This hopelessness in turn leads to a “constriction in initiative and planning,” in which the victim's “field of initiative is increasingly narrowed.”

“The prisoner no longer thinks of how to escape, but rather of how to stay alive, or how to make captivity more bearable. A concentration camp inmate schemes to obtain a pair of shoes, a spoon, or a blanket; a group of political prisoners conspire to grow a few vegetables; a prostitute maneuvers to hide some money from her pimp; a battered woman teaches her children to hide when an attack is imminent” (p. 90)

We might add: a college student covers her drink at a party to avoid being drugged and raped, a teenage girl wears her headphones to not hear the boys on the corner who catcall her, a young woman leaves work early so she won't have to walk after dark. Again, it is not at all my intention to undermine the serious or particularly unique nature of significant traumas such as those in Herman's example, but rather to suggest that these extreme examples bear a conceptual similarity to the conditions of broader social captivity, and its felt effects on women.

It is certainly not my assertion that the experience of prolonged or captive trauma is the same as what I am arguing as the microtraumatization of women, but rather, that for how *dissimilar* these experiences seem to be, there should not be any real comparisons at all. There should be *no way* to compare the experiences of a teenage girl walking home from school and a concentration camp inmate, on any plane whatsoever. And though the circumstances and experiences are extremely different, there *is* some commonality between these experiences when it comes to decreased initiative, a sense of internalized perpetrator, an inability to predict where violence will come from, and a sense of inevitability or constant threat.

While it is a depressing realization that we live in a culture where the microtraumatization of women is so commonplace that we fail to even notice it anymore, this analogy also offers us new directions for conversation, and for thinking through how to heal such a culture. Though the wound of trauma is deep, trauma researcher Cathy Caruth (1996) notes that there is "a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" (p. 2, italics original) and which tells us truths that are important to hear.

I believe we as psychologists need to expand our definition of trauma to include both macro and micro levels of traumatization, as we currently have no way of clinically addressing, or



even really talking about, the ways in which women encounter oppression and sexism on a daily basis. Because the disciplinary power of patriarchy necessarily erases itself, many women may not attribute their problems to the social context that they live in, and it is our job as psychologists to be aware of this context, and to address it as needed. Again, to bring back the work of Foucault, we must also look at the two sided coin of the discourse of trauma as we currently employ it.

Our present research into trauma offers us useful knowledge about what happens to those who undergo extreme instances of violence and violation, as well as observations for how they have (or have not) lived and gone on after being traumatized. However, we must also realize that by constructing the discourse of trauma in one way, and encouraging exploration in one direction, we are discouraged from looking in other directions, or from recognizing the traumatic capacity of other instances.

I would like to be careful here, as I do think that care must be taken to preserve the sanctity of the word trauma, and that we as a field and as a people must have a word and a way of talking about experiences that fundamentally wound in a different and more profound ways. My intention is not to dilute or disrespect the use of the word trauma by using it in the micro sense here – on the contrary, I am choosing such a word because I think it conveys a seriousness with respect to women's experiences that is unappreciated. The parallels between the situation of captive trauma and women's experiences living in a patriarchal culture are not simply interesting, I believe they point to the truly degrading effects that the microtraumatization of a sick culture can have. This is not to say these micro instances add up to exactly the same impact as a major trauma – such comparisons would be impossible (and useless) to make – but that the effect of daily existence within a hostile and sick culture can be traumatic for women, and that this effect is underrecognized by psychotherapists.

Because of the way we view culture as interacting with the individual – separate and outside – traditional psychotherapy does not generally understand how a culture could be pathological, or how the experience of living with that may have a microtraumatic effect on women. I have demonstrated similarities between the cases of trauma victims and women not to illustrate that they are the same, but to show how sometimes the outcome of these very different events is similar. Even though many women may bear similar patterns of symptomology to typical trauma victims – feeling isolated, hopeless, disempowered, or silenced – these symptoms are often not seen or treated as such because there is no macro trauma in the patient’s history, or no identifiable aggressor.

We may go looking for a trauma – some childhood abuse long forgotten – and indeed, we may find one, particularly given the prevalence of even such major traumas in the lives of women. However, psychologists should also attend to the more micro and ongoing instances of traumatization that affect the lives of our female patients, and respect the multileveled experiences of trauma and repression. That is, we might understand that some traumas are repressed because they are so shocking, while others may be repressed because they are simply so ordinary.

Just as there may be some dynamic or structural similarities between the patterns of response produced as a result of macro or micro captive trauma, there may also be some similarities when it comes to how individuals who have experienced these events can reorient or gain some freedom from suffering in their lives. Insights from Herman and other trauma researchers point to the fact that connection with community, consciousness raising and discourse changing, and social action are often crucial steps for victims of trauma in recovering, or at least beginning to move away, from their traumas.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Another language trap – all our typical phrases here: “to move forward” to “recover” to “get over” imply there is some end to suffering, or that traumas can be made useful in some way, a capitalist and positive psychology bent that

Herman (1997) writes, “The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others,” and that therefore, “recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (p. 133). Similarly, as my participants suggested, what women need to begin healing is *connection*: with individual others as well as to a larger community. While therapy can be a useful place to form a gratifying and often healing relationship with another person, “the relationship between survivor and therapist is one relationship among many. It is by no means the only or even the best relationship in which recovery is fostered” (Herman, 1997, p. 134).

Culture jamming might offer an additional relationship in which women could foster their own senses of empowerment and healing. As illustrated in the previous results chapter, culture jamming enables an incredibly valuable way for women to connect to each other, as well as to a larger community. Amplifying the healing effects of connection beyond a singular therapist, or even a group of friends or fellow patients, culture jamming allows the jammer to relate to others and to be herself in relation to them. Interestingly, as Hannah’s comments that she can only “have the conversation” by “doing the work” suggest, the kind of connection that culture jamming offers – an anonymous and often somewhat abstract one – might be an even safer starting point than therapy for some women, who may not yet be ready for the vulnerable and often power-laden nature of connecting with a therapist.

Again, this is not to pit culture jamming and psychotherapy against each other as healing arts, but to suggest how they might work in tandem. While therapy can allow for an intimate one to one relationship to develop over time, and have some healing power by way of this connection,

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I certainly wish to eschew. However, I am here talking of therapeutics, and I think when we speak of healing it is necessary to remind ourselves that this is not a healing that is an end, but a healing that is a movement, a gesture towards the new, or a hint of a possibility other than suffering.

creative activism enables a different kind of connection and thus, a different kind of healing.

Because culture jamming by its very nature is collaborative, women who jam are also able to quickly see their projects move beyond themselves, and to experience the strength of community beyond their own individual interests or resources. Lillian and Caitlin's stories are particularly compelling here, as both their actions were completely individual at first – a lone woman placing a note, or a poster – yet both felt that neither the effect on them personally nor the social success of the project would have been attained if other women had not joined and strengthened their numbers.

This collaboration is key to healing for those living in a sick culture, and may be essential for those healing from trauma as well. The need to have the community recognize and respect stories of suffering voiced by my participants was echoed in Herman's (1997) work, as she writes:

“Many acts that women experience as terrorizing violations may not be regarded as such, even by those closest to them. Survivors are thus placed in the situation where they must choose between expressing their own point of view and remaining in connection with others.” (p. 67)

Victims of trauma are often unable to speak their experiences without risking isolation from the few connections they may retain. Though in very different ways, I believe that women are also silenced and discouraged from speaking about their experiences, and that they also risk alienation and exclusion when doing so (as the portrayals of feminism as negative and “bitchy” demonstrate!).

While we work to change cultural attitudes, culture jamming allows women to speak their

experiences to a massive audience without necessarily risking exclusion from their immediate family or friends. That is, culture jamming offers a platform for speech that is often anonymous, and thus allows women to have a voice even when it may be impossible for them to speak in their local environments without threatening their interpersonal connections. Therapy of course does this as well, via the private and intimate space of the consulting room, but jamming allows for a different, and larger scale recognition: one that may be very helpful for some women. Creative activism allows participants to connect with others, to engage in action, and to see their struggles as part of a larger narrative, something bigger than themselves; and this kind of action can be very healing for women, as well as victims of trauma (many of whom are women). Herman notes that,

“Social action offers the survivor a source of power that draws upon her own initiative, energy, and resourcefulness, but that *magnifies* these qualities far beyond her own capacities... it brings out the best in her; in return the survivor gains the sense of connection with the best in other people” (p. 207-208, italics added).

By acting in the social sphere and in consort with others, creative activism offers women a way to magnify their capabilities and to experience taking back control over some of the messages that may be damaging to them. It also fosters a unique sense of connection that affirms my sense – and my participants’ input – that connection through social action can have a healing effect for women living in a pathological society.

Gathering together the ways in which connection, public awareness, and helping others can function together through social action, Herman’s comments underscore how action helps people who have been disempowered to regain a sense of agency and possibility beyond their own efforts

by helping those who may suffer similarly. Additionally, “in taking care of others, survivors feel recognized, loved, and cared for themselves” (Herman, 1997, p. 209) and acting on behalf of others seems to have an especially therapeutic effect.

Culture jamming allows participants to care for others and, in so doing, care for themselves. Caitlin’s story is particularly salient here, and we are reminded that when she felt her worst, Caitlin could only care for herself *through* caring for another person; could only believe *she* was beautiful by saying someone else was beautiful. This externalizing and care for others is quite common in women – indeed, it is how we are discursively constituted *as* women (e.g. Gilligan, 1982) – and thus should perhaps not be fought against in a healing context, but embraced. Culture jamming allows for one context in which women can connect with and care for each other, and, in turn, come to care for themselves.

Though they work to solve very different problems, in very different ways, and from very different experiential frameworks, jammers and therapists may share common goals of helping those who feel vulnerable, unsafe, and stuck in place to feel more connected, empowered, and free. Creative activism allows for a unique kind of cultural and individual change that may help individual women to feel more able to connect and speak in a safe way, while also affecting larger framing discourses in ways that traditional psychotherapy is unable to. Culture jamming also allows for a novel means of achieving many of the aims that psychotherapists agree are beneficial: connection with others and sharing of suffering.

Because of the viral nature of culture jamming, which encourages women to act in the face of a culture that often makes them feel captive and helpless, jamming offers a powerful way for women to feel engaged and effective. Additionally, the mass packaging and audience of culture jamming allows women to have a sense of connection without risking their anonymity, which may

be precious to them in a landscape of perpetual gazing. Though the constant, grinding nature of microtraumas in a pathological culture may instill a sense of inevitability and hopelessness, culture jamming provides a unique way for individuals to see fault lines in the normative systems of power, and to feel empowered to exist differently.

Precisely because women's field of initiative and planning may be constricted due to the overwhelming nature of the culture they live in, creative activism offers an incredibly valuable way for women to see their own capabilities reflected in the actions of other women, and to begin to act, if not for themselves, then on behalf of other women. As women internalize a sense of constant threat and omnipresent perpetrator through constant media images, jammers interrupt these messages where they occur, and allow for a different internalization to take place, an interruption in the same old script of sexualization.

## ***Limitations***

### *The limits of culture jamming*

Just as all therapeutics are limited, however, so too of course is culture jamming. As my participants acknowledged and I must readily agree, culture jamming may be highly effective at changing culture and healing individuals in some ways, while falling short in others. These limits, which were mentioned in the first Results chapter and alluded to in the second, are recapitulated in this section with an eye towards how psychotherapy and creative activism might complement, rather than replace each other.

Culture jamming's attractive, flashy packaging is eye catching, and helps it to blend into

the mainstream discourse, but these same features make it potentially forgettable, or vulnerable to misinterpretation. Sophie worries that people will just “have 10 minutes where they’re like ‘oh, that’s cool, I never thought about that before’ and then get back to their own lives” (SH35). This concern is quite valid, and the trouble with engaging a trend is the real possibility that as soon as the glimmer of ‘cool’ wears off, so does any interest in social justice. While capitalizing on the imagery and slogans of marketing campaigns, acts of culture jamming risk being shelved alongside the hundreds of other bids for attention that the individual encounters on a daily basis, precisely *because* jams look no different than any other advertisement or internet sensation.

Part of why feminist artists like Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Cindy Sherman remain so crucial to cultural change is that they carry a historical trace, and they maintain a historical record, for our movement. As discussed in the Literature Review, these women not only importantly mark out a space and a history from which culture jamming has proceeded, they also maintain this history in a way that creative activism cannot. Culture jamming is, by its nature, ephemeral – here today, gone tomorrow – and without follow up, or help from other fields who hold the record of these actions, instances of culture jamming may well be forgotten. Rebecca and Hannah both emphasized the need for “follow up” (RN4) and “bringing it back to an analog place” (HB19) in order to address the limitations of flashy packaging, and both underscored how the long term success of creative activism depends on its ability to impact discursive formation and transcend the momentary *détournement*.

Additionally, Meghana notes “the quality of the messages is sometimes diluted” (MK12) with creative activism, highlighting how in order to grab people’s attention, the messages of feminism or social justice sometimes have to be simplified. This also brings back the tensions that are thematic to this dissertation of working within or outside normative systems, a tension I’ve not



yet solved (and with so many pages behind us!). The use of normative discourse seems to be a mixed bag: while it helps jammers to appear as part of the normal, everyday world, it also limits the terms of engagement to normative discourse and language. Because they want a more universal appeal, jammers must make their messages easy to understand, and free of heavily political terms like ‘feminism.’ While this approach is highly effective at reaching a massive audience, it is limited in its ability to fully disclose all the meanings or issues at play within the jam itself, and is more useful as a spark for further action and education.

Practically, Sophie also reminds us that “there’s only so many times that you can hack Playboy” and that “we can only be sneaky for so long before people figure us out” (SH35). Culture jamming works to poke holes in discourses and turn them in on themselves precisely because it is a *novel* approach, and something will surely be lost if it gains popularity as a mainstream practice. Creative activism is effective at piquing public interest because it is something different and unique, but this also means that jammers must be forever on their toes to try and present their messages in new, unexpected ways, or place them in ever more surprising locations.

Running ahead of their audience, creative activists must be constantly “responsive to context and responsive to audience” (HB22), which may grow too exhausting and difficult as time wears on. Further, if jammers compete with advertisers to fill a constant craving for novelty and spontaneity in their audience, then they might be doing less to disturb the supporting culture of consumption and objectification than they hope. Some (e.g. Klien, 2009) might argue that culture jamming does little to actually disrupt a culture of objectification precisely because it still works within the media, and with the images and strategies of the dominant culture, which are fundamentally flawed.

As Foucault would remind us, there is great danger in appearing normal and being folded

into normative society. While working with the dominant system and within dominant discourses allows creative activists to sneak in messages of social justice to those that might otherwise never hear them, it also threatens culture jamming's ability to hold its ground, or to not simply be co-opted and regulated along with other discursive messages. Jammers may reject overt references to feminism because they will 'give away' the ruse they are trying to sustain, but it should also be considered how this rejection may just serve to bolster the dominant discourse, or play into the existing power structures that erase or silence women who attempt to play outside the rules.

These limitations should underscore that culture jamming, while unique and, I believe, extremely interesting and important, is just one of the many tools we need to seriously consider including in our quiver of therapeutic arrows. Creative activism can empower individuals and allow for some connection that may lead them to a place of beneficial self-exploration in psychotherapy (as Hannah notes: "if I didn't have anything to do about it I still wouldn't have talked about it" HB48) or garner attention that then leads audiences to seek out education. It is also an incredibly unique and potentially highly therapeutic practice on its own, at both individual and cultural levels. Despite its limitations, creative activism rhizomatically bonds with feminism, art, therapy, protest, and education to create new possibilities and lines of flight previously unimaginable.

### *The limits of this research*

As culture jamming, as all things are limited, I must also acknowledge the limits of this research. It is my responsibility to be transparent, as I outlined in the Method chapter, that I am a human being and that the methods I have chosen here are interpretive. Therefore, the reader should

be aware that these results are subject to my point of view, and my writing, and may be experienced differently by my participants, or by different readers. While I make a strong case for the systemic suffering of women, and for the sickness of our culture, I must also of course acknowledge there are some women who do *not* feel traumatized by the sexism in our culture, or who do not fit the description I have offered here. These women's accounts are certainly legitimate, and they should not be undermined, nor should they undermine the genuine and legitimate suffering of other women.

It is also certainly the case that women, while facing unique struggles as a social category, are not the only group of people in our country who suffer daily microtraumatization, or who need empowerment, connection, and advocacy. Due to the unequal nature of power distribution in our culture, my findings may bear similarity to the experiences of many marginalized people, including people of color, LGBTQ people, or any group of people who face daily discrimination due to class, ability, or other discursively constructed identities. I have chosen to study women because I perceive a great deal of silence still suffocating women, and because of my own academic and personal affinities, not out of any belief that women suffer solely, or even the most, in our society.

I also know there are many fascinating acts of culture jamming that could not be included here, due to an anonymous author, a lack of space, or my own ignorance of them. There are many exciting things that people are doing, every day, in strange and startling new ways, and I hope in future research to continue to collect and unfold some of these tales. Though I have included the intersectional material between these chapters to try and address some of the sea of images and events that informed me during this research, there is always so much more than can be arrested by the page.

I must also acknowledge that by framing this piece of knowledge as research, by using the particular terms that I am, and by actively advocating for culture jamming as an approach, I also set up certain traps, and am at once cornered and trapped within my own speech. Cushman's historical tracing of psychotherapy gives me pause to continuing our field's indulgence of medical terminology, and I recognize, as I have alluded throughout these pages, that by using the metaphor of sickness, treatment, and healing I am engaging powerful and problematic discourses.

Such a move not only risks further sedimenting a medicalizing cultural history, but also potentially embodying the worst of positive psychology: always aiming for more growth and better outcomes, insisting on solution, and silencing complaint for its own sake. To be sure, many of the authors I have used here — Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, and Foucault chiefly among them — would shake their heads at what can be fairly interpreted as simply a new permutation in a ceaseless substitution of center for center, power for power, this for that. It is not at all my intention to crown culture jamming the new queen of cultural change, nor to go head to head with therapy for who heals the best and the most. Nor is it my intention to suggest that all suffering may be healed, or that suffering should somehow be overcome or made useful to others.

Nevertheless, I feel pulled to take some action, understanding that any action is fraught with peril, implication, and misunderstanding. Any stance is always a betrayal: of that other possibility, that interpretation not followed, those musings not included. Yet we must act. We must act because there are real stakes in this fight, and real women being chalked up every day as collateral damage. The real stakes are not being able to walk home alone at night, or go to a party alone. The real stakes are women who can't even hear their own names without being reminded of their status in relation to men, or whose bodies and wages are legislated by those who don't even bother to understand them. The real stakes, as we must never forget, are one in four, and these

stakes are simply too high. Political prisoner Jacobo Timerman (1981) writes, “The Holocaust will be understood not so much for the number of victims as for the magnitude of the silence. And what obsesses me most is the repetition of silence.” (p. 141)

As therapists, we can no longer participate in this repetition of silence. We are called, above all, to witness: to not forget, to not look away. During the year of this research I found myself out at a bar with a colleague, throwing ideas about and discussing a lecture we’d recently been to by Michael Sipiora, who had talked about radicalizing and engaging the political in therapy. My friend nodded when he should, and raised his eyebrows at me over his beer glass, asking “do you really want to get into it?” Yes — of course I did!

A fellow therapist, my friend told me he agreed with everything I was saying, and he thinks that patients don’t recognize the political in their experience nearly enough. But, listen, he said, “I’m not going to conscript them to my war. It’s not my job to get them involved in my war, you know?” I do know. And I nodded back, having taken now several months to digest his thoughts and to formulate a reply (the public format for which I hope he will forgive me).

I respect this colleague very much, and I also respect and appreciate his position. But the fact of the matter remains that there *is* a war on, and it is not mine or anyone’s, but shared by each of us in every violent act of silence. To state the facts when facts are so damning is certainly a political act, but far too many in our field have far too quickly drained their therapies of the political, shying across the cultural landscape and believing that any definitive statement — it *is wrong* that women in our culture are treated this way — contaminates our healing. This is the worst of objectivity, and certainly is not objective at any rate. To choose *not* to call attention to the social sphere, or *not* to position issues politically is to *choose* to position them otherwise, or to leave the political interpretation aside. We are already in this war, whether we like it or not – I

merely suggest we start using different weapons.

It is a funny thing to be concluding a post-structural, post-modern, critical dissertation talking of stances and facts, weapons and wars. I feel the sting of betrayal already in my clicking fingertips as I advocate that women *really* have these experiences and that their truths are covered over. Truth? “*Really*”? However, I am reminded that for all of their complex theory and indeed, for their writing on the perils of certainty, it is these same authors that might chide me the most — Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari — that were also the most social justice oriented, radical activists of their fields at the time. Their legacy, all of their legacies, compel the very thing they wrote of with such respect and caution: we must act.

### ***Conclusions: A call to action, a call to witness***

*“This is how the spell is broken. This is how the revolution begins: A few people start slipping out of old patterns, daydreaming, questioning, rebelling.” - Kalle Lasn (1999, p. 108)*

How then, to conclude? As I have stated, my goal is not for culture jamming to be the new reigning champion of social change, nor for every therapist to leave her consulting room and take to the streets with a can of spray paint and a big idea. Rather, it is my hope that we as a field might use the poignant example of creative activism to help us better understand our patients, our world, and our place in it. Culture jamming in this research does exactly what it does best out in the world: it shines a spotlight on how society is failing, and it gives us hope, both abstractly and concretely.

Above all, clinicians should take seriously the work of advocates and cultural activists as

comrades and equals in what is indeed a war. To do so, we must open our eyes to the violence raging all around us. Creative activism offers a unique way that clinicians as well as citizens may have their consciousness raised. If we truly understand the complex interrelation of individual and culture, then our goal as clinicians in helping our clients necessarily must involve some level of healing the community, and the world around us.

Primarily, I am arguing for a change in the way psychology conceptualizes individual and cultural sickness, and calling for therapists to attend to outside elements *in order to* effect changes in who comes (or who has to come) to the therapy room. It may also be the case that much of what makes culture jamming therapeutic – receiving public recognition, working with massive audiences, gaining a community of support – cannot be translated into the psychotherapeutic context, and is structurally precluded in the practice of therapy.

This of course is fine, and should only stress the unique natures of both psychotherapy and culture jamming and the need for their co-existence as different healing arts. Just all as therapeutics – individual or cultural – are limited, therapy and culture jamming have different limitations, and offer different forms of healing. The point I would like to make, however, is that these two disparate practices are often capitalizing on similar themes, and working towards similar ends, and that creative activism offers a unique and novel means of work.

For example, my participants identified that enabling alternative images is part of what they see as crucial to cultural change, and of course we know as therapists that envisioning alternative possibilities is often a core tenant of therapy. Though the therapist does this intra-psychically and personally, and the jammer does it culturally and publically, there is a twinning of goals here that should be recognized, and celebrated. While the levels at which they do so are quite different, fundamentally, both culture jammers and clinicians seek to help those who

feel limited by their possibilities be able to see new possibilities.

Similarly, therapy may offer patients a healing connection through a one on one relationship of depth and intimacy, while creative activism can allow a person to connect to a huge community of people and to feel folded into a movement and something larger than herself. Therapy offers an incredibly valuable place to share one's stories of suffering, which all participants cited as valuable. Culture jamming also differently allows women a way to share their stories, and to have them heard by huge audiences; which may create interesting changes not only at the individual level, but also at the cultural level. In these ways, both culture jamming and psychotherapy support many core, empowering experiences that women may require to begin healing from the effects of a pathological culture, and jammers and therapists should be aware of their common goals and work.

#### *Implications for within the therapy room*

Though I believe the practices of jamming and psychotherapy are related, but different, I would like to nevertheless conclude with a few concrete suggestions for how clinicians may incorporate the insights from this research specifically into their clinical practice. While working outside the therapy room to administer cultural therapeutics, we must also take care that our treatment does not mimic those same social conditions of erasure, silencing, isolation, and inevitability that our patients may face in the world. If we reconceptualize the relationship between culture and individual, and understand a culture of daily, microtraumatization of women, then we must shift our practice. Understanding that systemic sexism, erasure of women's experiences, silencing, and a sense of inevitability pervade our female patients' lives, then what does this mean



for our clinical treatment of women in a general sense?

Firstly, we as psychologists can think about expanding our treatments to better model the gestalt nature of the person and world within the therapy itself. We might take the advice of Hillman and Ventura (1992), who advocate that “the consulting room be a cell in which revolution is prepared” (p. 38) by helping our patients to properly situate and understand their personal struggles within a sociopolitical and historical context. Hillman and Ventura are among a growing body of cultural and hermeneutic psychologists who attempt to critique and transform therapy in order to include more of the social sphere, and this research supports and affirms these efforts.

Sipiora (2014) advocates for a radical new approach to therapy that shifts the therapeutic question away from “repairing a deficit” and towards establishing “a deeper appreciation of the meaning and import of [the patient’s] experience as being *both* about them *and* the world in which they live” (p. 14). That is, while we currently help patients to see how their troubles replicate their childhood homes, sedimented relationship dynamics, or ways of thinking, we could *also* help our patients to see the way their troubles relate to the culture they live in.

When a female client comes in complaining of depression, feeling she should be more available to others and despairing over missed work, we could explore with this patient not only how these symptoms function for her in the local environment of her psyche and family, but also how they might relate to cultural expectations that women should “have it all,” or to the gender dynamics in her workplace.

This kind of therapy would be one in which the therapist “normalize[s] rather than pathologize[s] clients’ experience in accord with their circumstances,” and does so “without minimizing their suffering or discounting their distress” (Sipiora, 2014, p. 14). That is, we do not attribute the patient’s troubles to the world in order to imply they are out the patient’s hands, nor to

suggest that they do not personally and uniquely affect the patient. Rather, we can call attention to the cultural constellation of our patients in order to *pay respect* to how deeply these discourses may pain our patients, and to help our patients understand themselves as fully as possible.

Cushman (1995) similarly argues for psychotherapy to return to a fuller, “moral discourse” that helps the patient to shift horizons of meaning within their experience and see themselves within the larger context of their world’s suffering. The provocative epigraph from Hillman and Ventura (1992): “do therapists ever ask their patients how they vote?” (p. 216) illustrates one surprising and concrete way in which we could imagine therapists helping their patients to make connections between the personal and political (connections which may be unclear to the patient at first). Imagine what might happen in a session if a patient, discussing the bind she feels trapped in between having a baby right after undergraduate or waiting to go to graduate school, was asked who she planned to vote for rather than for the pros and cons of each decision, or her associations to motherhood.

Such a question would likely puzzle the client – what does that have to do with anything? – and cause a momentary interruption (a second look, perhaps a *détournement*?) but would, by its very asking, encourage her to think about the relation between her decision and the political trappings around such a decision. Of course the issue she is speaking to is deeply related to cultural forces, and her framing of the question already implies a discourse of imperative motherhood, or a rivalry between education and motherhood. Rather than going along with this unstated premise, a discursively minded therapist might highlight it, or propose a connection between previously unconnected domains of the patient’s experience. Sapiro (2014) writes:

“Therapists’ interpretations serve to unmask distortions and deceptions, concealed

agendas, and unconscious dynamics that are present in the client's lived experience. Of course this is no easy task. One doesn't offer an interpretation until the moment when the client can see things for her or his self, yet awareness of the socio-political configuration of the clearing is not readily within the client's grasp. Indeed such awareness is denied in the hegemony of economic functionality, a part of the repressed spiritual unconscious." (p. 15-16)

Going back to Freud, therapists have trained to selectively attend to those elements which are more likely to be repressed, or to carry shame for the patient. Part of the reason psychoanalysts typically ask about, or focus on, fantasies of sex or violence is because these are taboo topics, about which the patient is encouraged not to speak. While we accept that following the repressed links of family, sexuality, or aggression is a sound clinical strategy, we balk at a similar tact for engaging the social context of the patient's life, about which she is also encouraged not to speak.

I am reminded of my cautious friend here, who would argue that what I am advocating is enlisting patients into an ideological war. In one sense, he is right – by connecting a patient's individual problem to a social issue, we are making a certain choice, and we are calling for a certain kind of response. Of course, connecting the problem to the patient's mother's early career, or to her history of indecision are simply different choices, and each invites the patient to take up different identities and disclose different worlds.

Given the unique struggles of women, and the pathological culture of microtraumatization I have argued for here, female patients may be even less likely than others to take up sociopolitical associations to their problems because of a sense of hopelessness and a restricted view of alternatives. Therapists can combat a culture of silencing, and a sense of inevitability, by calling

into the light the prevailing discourses that may be impacting the patient, and of which even she may not be aware. By highlighting the social dimension that is often repressed by the patient, therapists can resist “colluding with de-formative social forces or foisting social problems onto individuals” (Sipiora, 2014, p. 16).

By “recasting the problem at the societal level rather than at the level of the individual,” (Burr, 2003, p. 122) we encourage patients not only to make novel connections, but also to occupy novel subject positions. If access to alternative subjectivities and possibilities is healing at the individual as well as cultural level, therapists can broaden their patients’ views of themselves by re-situating the patient’s role, not as the center of a psychodrama, but as a the participant in a situation which goes beyond her. Burr (2003) offers a compelling example of how this readjustment might happen therapeutically:

“For example, ‘depression’ is a term which locates problems within the internal psychology of the individual. A woman may complain of depression, feeling that she cannot cope with her life. Perhaps she feels that she is a bad mother because she frequently loses her temper with her young children, or that she is an inadequate daughter because she is reluctant to care for her own elderly mother... [however] the discourses of motherhood, femininity, family life and so on actively encourage women to engage in practices which are not necessarily in their own psychological, social and economic best interest. Thinking of oneself as *oppressed* rather than *depressed* fosters a different view of oneself and of how to attack one’s problem; the woman in the example will still have to decide what to do about her elderly mother, but she may not feel so conflict-ridden and guilty.” (p. 122-123, italics added)

By shifting our patient's attention towards the competing demands of motherhood, femininity, and family life, rather than focusing on her inability to meet them, we shift attention towards the *impossibility* of meeting these demands. The question for the patient can then change from "what is wrong with me?" to "what is going on here?" – a question that will necessarily include *all* dimensions of her life, including the sociocultural. In any case, we as therapists need to take care that we do not practice a therapy that "unknowingly reproduces some of the ills it is responsible for healing" (Cushman, 1995, p. 6) by holding patients responsible for more than is fairly theirs. Therapists can help engage some of the world in the patient's problem by expanding their horizons of meaning beyond their individual lives, suggesting novel connections to the sociopolitical context, and re-situating the patient's distress through implying new subject positions and places from which to speak.

#### *Implications for outside the therapy room*

In addition to our in-session strategies, however, clinicians should seriously consider the benefits of other therapeutic approaches, including cultural therapeutics, which the psychotherapy framework may be unable provide. If public recognition, connection with community, and taking action are necessary steps for women to recover from the effects of a pathological society, then therapists should suggest to patients any and all ways that they can engage in therapeutic activities which would allow them access to these crucial benefits – including those outside of the therapy room.

While we easily think of referring our patients to other medical or psychiatric specialists,

we do not generally refer them to social advocacy groups, or to cultural events. If the microtraumatization of women is as common as I assert it is, however, then we need to be willing to offer our patients all the help we can, including helping them to find additional means of healing themselves and their culture, or suggesting other therapeutics when they are appropriate. If women need connection with others, and a community of support, then therapists should suggest to their patients ways to meet those needs, which might include acts of culture jamming, or other social actions.

Though using very different means, and on a very different scale, jammers and therapists often fight for the same effects, and against the same forces. While not arguing for a collapse of that scale, and continuing to respect the unique and different work of these cultural healers and warriors, it is nevertheless my aim to promote greater connection and cross fertilization between these fields that have much in common, and much to learn from each other. We cannot consider ourselves good clinicians if we merely treat the symptoms of a sick culture through our patients, and do nothing to address the causes of so much of our patients' suffering. In order to be good clinicians, we must be good advocates, and we must be mindful not only of the ways in which our clients are constituted by their worlds, but how discrimination, oppression, and power imbalances pervade those worlds, particularly for women.

While this does not mean that every therapist need literally work as an activist, this research points to the crucial need for cultural therapeutics, and the serious impact of the cultural milieu on individuals. If we revise our understanding of the culture/individual relationship and accept that our culture seriously damages women, then in order to heal our female patients we cannot only administer individual therapy, which may insufficient in the face of such a massive problem, but must also administer cultural therapeutics. Administering cultural therapeutics may

take many forms, but if therapists rightfully hold a place in our culture as healers, we must respect and own responsibility for the cultural dimension that is a part and parcel to healing.

Given the compelling evidence that culture jamming may be an effective cultural therapeutic, I would certainly recommend it to any therapist as a practice. I believe that culture jamming offers a fascinating and novel approach to cultural change that capitalizes on new technologies and allows for some truly breathtaking feats of surprising social change. In addition to their positive individual effects, these events may well also have the capacity to shift cultural horizons as well as social discourse. Obviously, however, many other cultural therapeutics exist, and could be practiced as well. Therapists may engage in education – either formally or informally – or do volunteer work in their off hours. As this research indicates, art is still a powerful cultural therapeutic, which inspires as well as holds our aesthetic history, and therapists’ work in this realm may also be valuable.

Traditional activism is of course still badly needed, as is policy change, and therapists are uniquely poised to speak as ‘experts’ on behalf of pieces of legislation or social movements. As seen in the Intersectional material, I attempted to use my role as a psychologist to help my participants in whatever ways I could, providing them with information when they asked, or writing and endorsement letter for Hannah and Rebecca in support of a grant for the Monument Quilt. Since we as psychologists have been bestowed certain speaking rights as cultural healers, I contend that it is our responsibility to use these rights, and to use them towards justice. If we are vested with power/knowledge, so be it, but let it be towards endorsing those actions, protests, movements, and changes that create freer and fuller worlds for all of us. This is healing the culture, but it is also healing in the service of our individual patients. However we do it, we as clinicians are called to engage in broader practices of healing, if we truly aim to help.

Clinicians also owe it to their patients to be aware of the constitutive role of discourse, and to educate themselves about the sociopolitical contexts in which their patients exist. Though we should certainly engage in ongoing education where gaps in our knowledge may exist, we also need to more fundamentally re-evaluate how we see discourse and culture playing out in the lives of our patients. While of course we trust our patients to tell us their stories first and foremost, it is our responsibility as clinicians to be informed about the cultural forces at play that may impact our patients.

Particularly if microtraumas are repressed due to their everyday nature, and patriarchal oppression erased because of its discursive roots, patients may have difficulty seeing their troubles as occurring within a sociopolitical context. Because our current individualizing discourse of the self is so effective, patients may be entirely willing to translate any and all problems into self-work, and it is the therapist's job to not collude in giving the patient more responsibility than is hers. In order to do so, of course, therapists must know the situation of the world, and be able to speak to what responsibility belongs to the world and what belongs to the patient.

However we are called to act, I believe above all we are called to witness. We cannot turn a blind eye to the devastating effects of our culture, or to the ways in which we as people and as therapists sometimes participate in that culture. We must be willing to face the truth that there is much that needs to be done, and only some of which we are capable of doing. Certainly, we must revise our understanding of individual and culture and respect anew the complex, interpenetrating unit that they form.

Though the temptation to look away from that which horrifies has infected our culture, and threatened the history of our field, we as psychologists bear witness to the state of the world, and the entirety of a person's place within it. I would like to close with a quote from Judith Herman,



who I believe beautifully summarizes the role that we as therapists can, and indeed must play in our culture's current war on women:

“The consulting room is a privileged space dedicated to memory. Within that space, survivors gain the freedom to know and tell their stories. Even the most private and confidential disclosure of past abuses increases the likelihood of eventual public disclosure. And public disclosure is something that perpetrators are determined to prevent... moral neutrality in the conflict between victim and perpetrator is not an option. Like all other bystanders, therapists are sometimes forced to take sides. Those who stand with the victim will inevitably have to face the perpetrators unmasked fury. For many of us, there can be no greater honor.” (Herman, 1997, p. 246-247)

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